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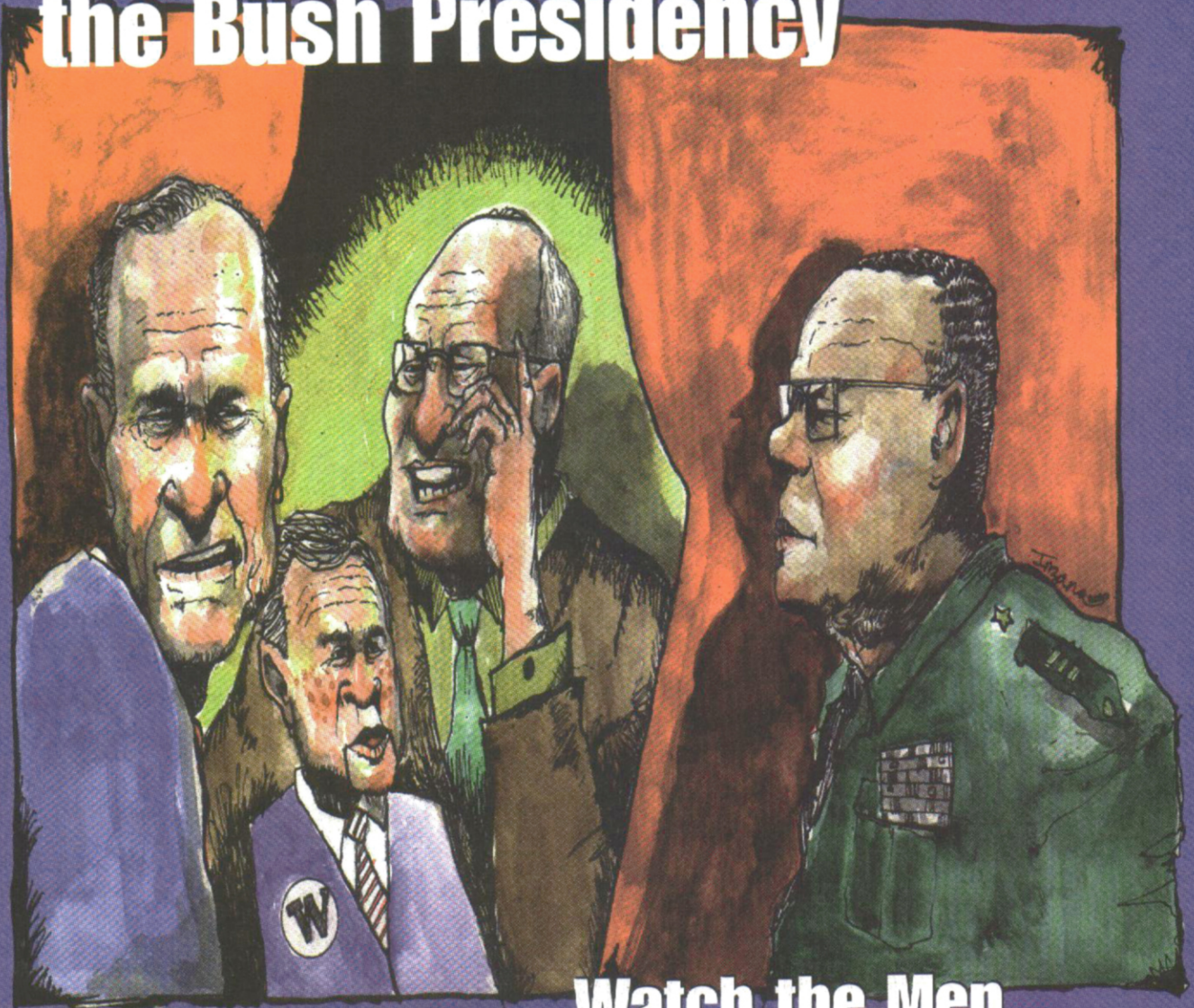
Year-End  
Double Issue

# In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

January 22, 2001

## How To Survive the Bush Presidency



### Watch the Men Behind the Curtain



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# In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

"... with liberty and justice for all"

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**Webmaster:** Steve Anderson

**Publisher:** Bob Burnett  
**Associate Publisher:** Julie Fain  
**Circulation Director:** Luli Buxton  
**Circulation Manager:** Peter Hoyt

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Phone: (773) 772-0100. Fax: (773) 772-4180.  
E-mail: [itt@inthesetimes.com](mailto:itt@inthesetimes.com).

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## Publisher's Notes

In my last column, I noted four distinct components of the left: the movements for social justice, the environment, economic justice and peace. I argued that while these groups, when at their best, are united in their opposition to multinational corporations (and to the conservative culture that moves in lockstep with them), a unifying movement of the left must offer more than a common enemy. It must define a positive vision.

I believe such a vision would be guided by three principles: a belief in equality and fundamental fairness; a conviction that the widening gulf between the rich and poor threatens our social fabric; and an understanding that corporate capitalism threatens democracy.

Most Americans believe in fairness. Indeed, fairness is so deeply ingrained in our social fabric that blatant inequality is difficult to justify. When those in power discriminate against a group, they dehumanize them. For example, when men denied women the vote, they did so on the belief that women were not complete humans—that they were not competent enough to handle the responsibility.

But those of us on the left are not only for fairness and equality, we believe that inequalities must be redressed and that we must build a society where equality is an everyday reality.

Each of the popular movements on the left struggles to overcome inequity. Within the social justice movement, the NAACP continually supports efforts for equality of access to housing, capital and credit. Similarly, within the arena of economic justice, "living wage" campaigns like EBASE here in Berkeley and Oakland seek to redress wage and benefit inequities.

Peace advocates protest the inequities inherent in the military budget. For each 50¢ the U.S. spends on the military, it spends 6¢ on education and 4¢ on health care; if the military budget were reduced by 20 percent—a safe amount according to experts—spending on education and health care could double.

When environmentalists protest against a toxic waste dump like the Umatilla Chemical Depot in Hermiston, Oregon, which leaked sarin and mustard gas in September 1999, they are not only protesting the dump itself, but also the tendency

of the powerful to foist off society's waste on the poor. The environmental movement has expanded the contemporary notion of fairness by broadening it to include respect for all planetary life.

A typical campaign for equality passes through three phases. In the legal phase, the battlefield is "equal protection under the law," the right to vote or the right to a comprehensive education, for example. In the identity phase, the struggle is over changing the way the dominant culture perceives those who have been denied equality—for instance, believing that women can hold public office and manage large institutions. Finally, in the economic phase, the issue becomes access to credit and capital and distribution of wealth—hard-core financial matters.

And it is here that most of the left gets bogged down. Despite the overall progress that women have made, they are still paid less than men. Despite the expansion of civil rights, Latinos and African-Americans are still disproportionately poor. Inevitably, the struggle for equality runs into the harsh reality of the class divide. Economic fairness is difficult to achieve, despite our commitment to that ideal, and the gap between the rich and poor continues to widen. But we cannot achieve true equality until we do something to remedy the increasing differences in wealth and power.

In recent times we have tended to be fragmented by a focus on single issues. Such a focus prevents us from addressing

**Inevitably, the struggle for equality runs into the harsh reality of the class divide.**

the economic component of equality. Furthermore, we fail to separate policy from values. In the same way that multinational corporations are fostered by a conservative culture, economic equality is fostered by a progressive culture. However, we have failed to consider the relationship between values and progressive ideology. I will begin to explore this subject in my next column.

*Bob Burnett*

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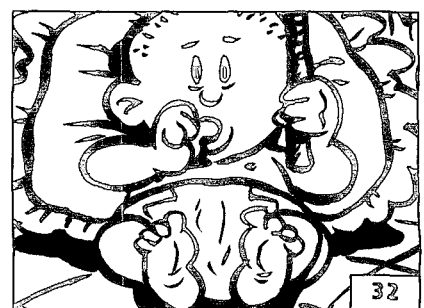
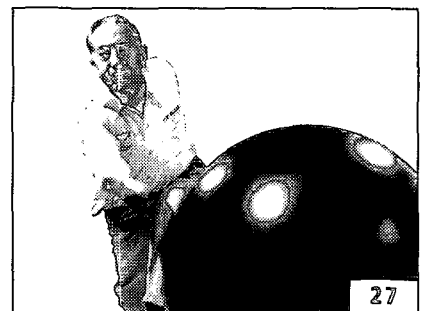
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Cover Illustration: Ryan J. Inzana

# Letters

## For Pete's Sake

My former colleague Joel Bleifuss' vituperative attacks on Ralph Nader and the Green Party seem based on a fantasy about the Democratic Party.

Bleifuss posits that the Democrats are a functioning polity where, in his words, "the majority of African-Americans, Latinos, trade unionists, feminists, environmentalists, and gays and lesbians practice politics." In fact, there's little place to practice politics in the Democratic Party because it was long ago transformed into a money- and vote-cadging machine run behind closed doors by professional operatives. The truth is that when the groups named above want something politically, there is no Democratic "there" to go to. They have to buttonhole individual Democratic politicians.

Bleifuss' advice that Nader should have run in the Democratic primaries is ludicrous on several counts. Modern primaries are configured not to contest political differences, but to eliminate the candidates with the thinnest checkbooks. Had Nader taken part in the primaries, he would have been able to bring his message only to a tiny audience of activist party regulars at enormous cost. And, if he had even modest success at this, he would have faced exactly the same charges of being a "spoiler" who was too extreme to win and therefore only hurting Al Gore's chances. In other words, Bleifuss likely would have been heaping the same abuse on Nader, only a year earlier.

My central Connecticut chapter of the Green Party, covering the small cities of Middletown and Meriden, has consistently, even after the election, had more people attending its meetings than the Democratic or Republican town committees of the far larger cities of New Haven and Hartford. The Green Party has permanent walk-in storefront service centers in those cities, or exactly two more than the major parties.

Our state computer network buzzes with alerts about joining actions with the same groups that Bleifuss says practice their politics with the Democrats. The Democrats' site is a screen saver by comparison. Our local chapter was happy to get past the election because our plate is brimming with issues and alliances.

**Pete Karman**  
Rockfall, Connecticut

## No Pie in My Sky

As a Nader voter, I could not help but respond to Joel Bleifuss' latest piece about the Nader/LaDuke campaign and its complicity in the "defeat" of Al Gore. As a graduate student in history at the University of Chicago, I suspect I fall in Bleifuss' depiction of the

Nader camp as "largely white, middle-class, youthful," but I take issue with his characterization of our vote as one based on pie-in-the-sky quasi-religious convictions.

Bleifuss (though I agree with him on many issues) has assumed an intellectual-political posture that has been all too frequent on the left this election year: the role of the *realpolitiker* who has to pull the utopians into line, or at least remind them of the implications of their dreamy, potentially dangerous ideas. Along with Eric Alterman, Todd Gitlin, Gloria Steinem, James Weinstein and an array of Democratic politicians and activists, Bleifuss chides Nader as a semi-fanatical crusader whose emphasis on moral purity and integrity blinds him to the realities of our two-party political system as much as it lowers the veil over the eyes of those who support him.

Those of us who voted for Nader may not always agree with how he characterizes the Republican and Democratic parties. After all, the campaign largely sponsored an atmosphere of intellectual nonconformity and enthusiasm. That enthusiasm does not and did not translate into the righteous or self-righteous temperament of a sect or cult, as Bleifuss implies.

Despite the bitter polemics of Bleifuss and others, those of us on the left who voted for Nader will move forward. We hope to democratize our republic, constituting a form of democratic practice that could bring about real progressive social transformation. Along with those like Bleifuss who insist on the viability of progressive elements of the Democratic Party (and I think he's right there), we who supported the Greens look forward to asking bolder questions of our politicians and the American public and posing bolder solutions.

**Jason Dawsey**  
Chicago

**Joel Bleifuss replies:** Like Ralph Nader, Pete Karman conflates the Democratic National Committee and the Democratic Leadership Council with local Democratic Party organizations. Nader makes this mistake because he has grown Beltway blinders, having spent most of his life in Washington, a town with two types of Democratic parties—the DLC-dominated DNC or a chronically corrupt and inept D.C. Democratic Party organization. In central Connecticut, Karman has no such excuse.

But I am glad to read, at last, a Nader supporter who tries to explain why his candidate didn't run in the Democratic Primary. Karman says Nader would have been marginalized due to his "thin checkbook." Sorry, that doesn't add up. In 1988,

Jesse Jackson shook up the Democratic Party and energized progressives with a campaign fueled not by money, but by the promise of a "real progressive social transformation," as Jason Dawsey puts it. Unfortunately, Jackson was temperamentally unsuited for building a mass democratic organization. And Nader appears to be so, too.

If the Green Party in central Connecticut is as vibrant and the Democratic Party as moribund as Karman suggests, then it stands to reason that Green Party activists could join the local Democratic Party chapter and exert enormous influence. To do so would not be a sellout of principle, but a strategic, tactical maneuver. Of course to do so would entail working with people—the Democrats—who are not as evolved and enlightened. It would also involve compromise of principle. And for many on the left, leaving their absolute moral universe is uncomfortable.

Over the past several months, a number of readers have canceled their subscriptions because of our editorial stand opposing Ralph Nader's third-party strategy. Many were offended by my reference to the quasi-religious role Nader's candidacy fills. In the September 18 issue, I wrote, "Nader's absolutist argument strikes a chord with many. We on the left have always had a hard time distinguishing between compromising our beliefs (maintaining personal integrity) and engaging in political compromise (participating in the give-and-take of civil society). This sectarianism, though understandable, is something we must outgrow."

To expand on that, America was first settled by Puritans. That severe form of Protestantism, with its emphasis on salvation being dependent on individual actions, still pervades the culture in a secular form, affecting all Americans whatever their religion. This has a positive side. Individual deeds do matter. Acting on principle is how people change the world. Righteous indignation at injustice is the fuel of social change.

On the other hand, politically righteous, highly principled people sometimes shy away from political compromise. Some have trouble respecting differences of opinion. They feel uncomfortable, sometimes outraged, seeing their assumptions challenged. Hence this propensity to vote for feel-good candidates and cancel subscriptions.

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# Nobody's Hero

By Joel Bleifuss

In the near universal acclaim that has smothered George W. Bush's choice for secretary of state of the nation's most famous warrior, Colin Powell, honest appraisal of the man behind the myth has been lost. Powell's journey from Bronx child to Republican *wunderkind* affirms the American dream. And lest that dream lose its sheen, we had best gloss over certain facets of his career.

The unvarnished history of Colin Powell can be found on the Web site [www.consortiumnews.com](http://www.consortiumnews.com), where Robert Parry and Norman Solomon chronicle Powell's ascension through the ranks of the military and foreign policy elite in the Nixon, Reagan and Bush administrations. As secretary of state, it is a good bet that Powell will promote a foreign policy that is foreshadowed by his Vietnam War record, his role in the Iran-contra scandals and his management of the Gulf War.

In his 1995 autobiography, *My American Journey*, Powell describes burning peasants out of their huts in 1963, "starting the blaze with Rooson and Zippo lighters." "Why were we torching homes and destroying crops?" Powell asks rhetorically. "Ho Chi Minh had said the people were like the sea in which his guerrillas swam. We tried to solve the problem by making the whole sea uninhabitable."

As a major in the headquarters of the Americal division in 1968, Powell whitewashed allegations that American soldiers committed atrocities against Vietnamese civilians. Tom Glen, a member of an Americal mortar platoon, had written a letter to Gen. Creighton Abrahms, head of the U.S. Vietnam operations, alleging that soldiers in the Americal division "for mere pleasure, fire indiscriminately into Vietnamese homes and without provocation or justification shoot at the people themselves."

Powell did not interview Glen. He relied instead on Glen's superior officer who said that Glen had been too far from the action to have any first-hand knowledge. Powell concluded: "In direct refutation of [Glen's] portrayal, is the fact that relations between Americal soldiers

and the Vietnamese people are excellent." Powell wrote that on December 13, 1968, seven months after Americal troops slaughtered 347 Vietnamese civilians in the hamlet of My Lai—a crime that the world had yet to hear about.

Twenty years later, Powell was again looking the other way, this time as a key player in the Iran-contra scandal. Powell claims to have known nothing of the scheme to send arms to Iran, in exchange for the release of American hostages in Lebanon, and the administration's efforts to covertly fund the contra's war in Nicaragua. However, at the time these illegal deeds were being carried out, Powell served as the right-hand man of Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger.

When questioned by an investigator, Powell repeatedly pleaded faulty memory. At one point he replied: "To my recollection, I don't have a recollection." He testified that he only found out about the shipment of missiles to Iran on January 17, 1986, the day Reagan formally authorized the transfers. Circumstantial evidence refutes this claim. So does

Oliver North, who testified that in his 1985 efforts to get U.S. missiles sent to Iran, "my original point of contact was General Colin Powell, who was going directly to his immediate superior, Secretary Weinberger."

Vietnam and Iran-contra taught Powell one lesson: Foreign policy objectives are more easily achieved the less the public knows. He applied this knowledge as director of Operation Desert Storm, which not only routed the Iraqis out of Kuwait, but strategically kept the media, and thus the public, away from the war.

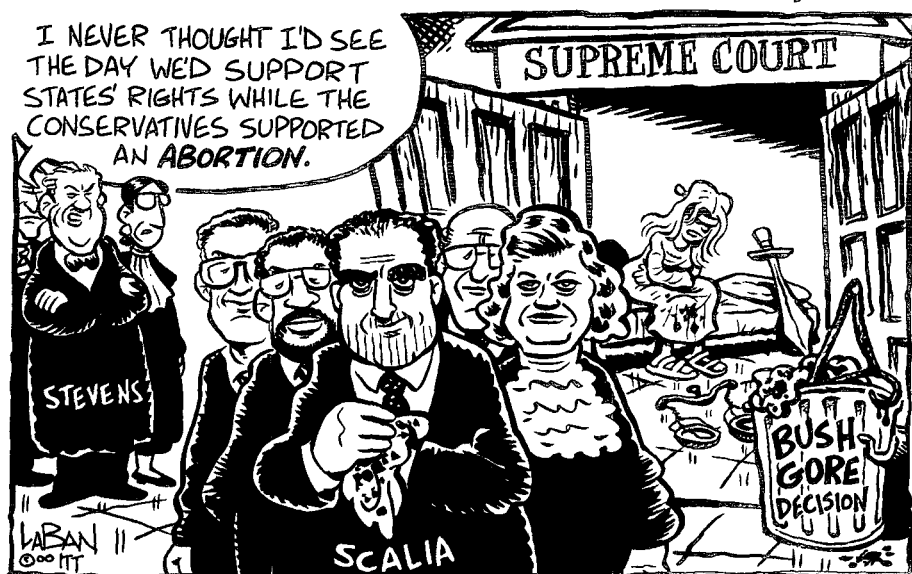
In accepting the nomination to be secretary of state (his approval is a mere formality), Powell explained that he would work with U.S. allies to "energize

**"To my recollection," Colin Powell told Iran-contra investigators, "I don't have a recollection."**

the sanctions regime" against Iraq. "I will make the case in every opportunity I get that we're not doing this to hurt the Iraqi people," he said. "We're doing this to protect the people of the region, the children of the region, who would be the targets of these weapons of mass destruction if we didn't contain them and get rid of them."

In other words, as he learned in Vietnam, you burn a village to save a village. ■

Terry LaBan



## Chasing Doves

Clinton makes a final appeal for peace in Northern Ireland

By Kelly Candaele

BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND—When President Bill Clinton visited Belfast in 1995—the first sitting president to visit Northern Ireland—he told a group of Protestant and Catholic factory workers that those who use violence for political purposes were part of the past, that their day was over. Ten weeks later, an Irish Republican Army bomb exploded in London, killing two and ending an 18-month IRA ceasefire.

Since then, although the Northern Irish peace process has made significant progress—the Good Friday agreement was signed in 1998 and overwhelmingly endorsed in a simultaneous referendum held in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic—it has been beset by periodic crises that have threatened to bring it down.

Clinton's third trip to Ireland in December—he has only been to Nebraska once during his presidency—was designed to move the peace process forward one more time, and to help solidify his foreign policy legacy. His choice of Dundalk as the venue for his major public appearance in the Irish Republic on December 12 was rich in symbolism: A few miles south of the Northern Irish border, Dundalk is a base for the "Real IRA," an IRA splinter group that opposes the peace process.

The following day Clinton moved on to Belfast, where he met with leaders of the pro-peace agreement parties in an attempt to break a dangerous impasse in the functioning of the political institutions established as part of the Good Friday agreement. At a public gathering in downtown Belfast, he proposed a possible way forward, beginning with dramatically reforming the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), the country's Protestant police force, scaling down British military operations and decommissioning IRA weapons.

The current impasse was predictable. While the Good Friday agreement established a complex power-sharing

structure—all major decisions take place through a process of "parallel consent" from each political community—the implementation of specific social and political reforms remains difficult.

For Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, major concerns have centered around police reform, British demilitarization and a general equality agenda for the nationalist community. While British army deployment in Northern Ireland is down to levels of the early '70s, there are still more than 13,000 troops stationed here. In the border counties of Armagh and Tyrone, daily

Irish Assembly and leader of the UUP, banned Sinn Fein ministers from attending meetings of the North/South Ministerial Council. The council, a critical part of the Good Friday agreement for nationalists, provides for a formal role for the Republic of Ireland government in the affairs of Northern Ireland. Trimble's unilateral move came in the wake of a stunning electoral defeat of the UUP in a parliamentary election by a member of Ian Paisley's hardline Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). Trimble is still the party leader, but he will likely face a leadership challenge over his handling of



In December, Clinton spoke in Dundalk, Ireland, known as a base for the Real IRA.

helicopter flights and military checkpoints are still commonplace.

Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams, in a visit to the republican stronghold of south Armagh prior to Clinton's visit, suggested that "the peace process has made little substantial difference in improving the quality of life for people in this area; indeed, many can legitimately argue that the circumstances have worsened." If the IRA is to avoid further splits, it is the activists in Armagh and Tyrone who have to be convinced that Adams' political strategy has paid off in concrete ways.

A major roadblock to peace is the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and its long history of unwillingness to share real political power. In November, David Trimble, First Minister of the Northern

the peace process at a conference in January. His opponents are pushing him to withdraw the UUP from the government, which would bring down the political institutions.

Trimble's ostensible position is that Sinn Fein will not be allowed back into full governmental participation until the IRA has re-engaged with the international commission of disarmament to discuss methods for putting the IRA's weapons permanently and verifiably beyond use. While the IRA has allowed two unprecedented inspections of its arms dumps, Trimble faces an increasingly intransigent DUP and has suffered from his failure to aggressively convince his own constituency of the benefits of the peace process.



Meanwhile, the RUC, which is more than 90 percent Protestant, is considered by many in the nationalist community as a "Unionist militia" that should be disbanded. The Patten Commission report, issued last September by former British governor of Hong Kong Christopher Patten, was supposed to be a blueprint for fundamental change. In addition to recommending a neutral name for a new police organization, the report advocated an independent policing board, a police ombudsman and a community-policing approach designed to create effective public accountability.

Trimble stated recently that the "peace process will be lost" if the Patten proposals are fully implemented, while both Sinn Fein and the more moderate nationalist Social Democratic & Labor Party (SDLP) have condemned the British government for having "gutted" major elements of the report. Legislation to reform the RUC has passed through the British Parliament, but Northern Irish Secretary Peter Mandelson has some discretion over how the plan is implemented.

Adams has already indicated that Sinn Fein cannot recommend nationalists for the new policing service. Key problems involve the symbolic but emotional issues of police oaths, badges and emblems—areas in which the Patten report advocated no association with either the British or Irish states—and the power of the policing board to initiate and follow through on reports of human rights violations. Sinn Fein and the SDLP also want less discretion in the hands of the secretary of state for Northern Ireland and the RUC chief constable.

Trimble's UUP will hold another conference in January, where he will assuredly face continued pressure to withdraw from government in the absence of IRA weapons decommissioning. It's unlikely that the IRA will return to full-scale war, but the peace process is stalled in a precarious position. Clinton's visit did not provide the hoped-for breakthrough. And with British elections scheduled for next year, there is further concern that room for political maneuvering will become increasingly limited.

It's difficult to say why Clinton has invested so much of his time and ener-

gy in an area of the world that most of the American foreign policy establishment has regarded as more complicated than important. In Dublin on the recent trip, he admitted that his advisers thought he was crazy for getting so closely involved. Clinton claims to have become fascinated with the Northern Irish "troubles" since his Rhodes Scholar years, but most American presidents have regarded problems there as an "internal" matter of the British and have refused to damage the Anglo-American "special relationship."

Outside the arena in Belfast where Clinton spoke, people reflected upon his role in Northern Ireland and on the implications of the Bush presidency. Sean Regan, a student at Belfast's Queens College, worried about Bush's interest in and knowledge of the complex politics of Northern Ireland. "I just don't see him having the same level of commitment about the peace process here as Clinton," he said. "It's too bad because we're going to need a strongly engaged United States to push this process along." ■

Kelly Candaele is a contributing writer for Irish America Magazine and the Irish Voice newspaper.

## Windows of Opportunity

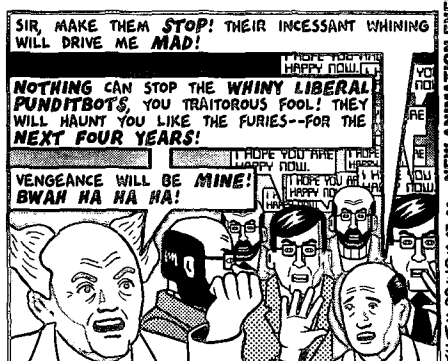
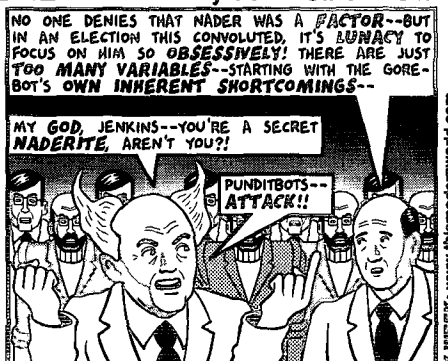
Temp workers union wins settlement from Microsoft

By David Moberg

It may not make a big difference to Bill Gates' net worth, but on December 12 Microsoft agreed to pay \$97 million to settle a lawsuit brought by a group of "permatemps"—employees who often worked for many years at the company but were classified as temporary and denied a range of benefits. At one point, more than one-third of workers at the company's headquarters in Redmond, Washington, including most employees in several key areas, were classified as permatemps. Microsoft had fought in court for eight years, but a federal appeals court ruled in May 1999 that the employees should have been permitted to buy stock at a discount just like other employees, but it did not decide that permatemps were entitled

## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



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to health insurance or participation in the 401(k) plan.

In a key ruling, the court decided that the permatemps were clearly employees like those with a permanent status—and different colored badge—who worked alongside them. “Simply calling a person a contractor or temporary employee does not change his status,” says Stephen Strong, one of the permatemps’ attorneys. “Employers have been trying to overcome facts with labels, but labels do not have control over facts.”

“It’s a clear vindication for the long-term contractors at Microsoft,” says Mike Blain, a former Microsoft permatemp who participated in the lawsuit and is now president of WashTech, the Washington Alliance of Technology Workers. WashTech, a Communications Workers local that is currently organizing

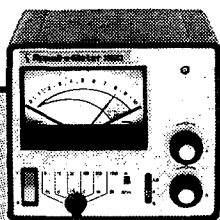
Amazon.com customer service representatives, was not a party to the lawsuit, but it has carried on low-key efforts to recruit support among Microsoft workers.

The settlement is the largest, though not the first, class-action lawsuit victory against abuse of permatemps, but it helped to give the issue a high profile. Other suits are pending against both public and private employers. In Los Angeles, a lawsuit against the office of the county counsel, the county’s civil lawyers, incorporates charges of sexual discrimination, since the nonprofit subsidiary set up by the counsel’s office to employ roughly half its work force as permatemps at reduced pay disproportionately included women workers, both clerical staff and lawyers.

Over the past two years, Democrats have introduced two different bills in Congress to limit employers’ ability to deprive workers of benefits by mislabeling them, to prohibit requirements that

employees’ sign waivers of their rights before getting hired, and to establish a simple test of whether a worker is really an independent contractor. Meanwhile, Republicans have introduced legislation that would essentially legalize permatemping through employment agencies.

The lawsuit undoubtedly contributed to a change in policies at Microsoft, which has converted about 3,000 contract employees to regular status but has also established new requirements for its roughly 5,000 remaining temps in the Seattle area, requiring a 90-day break after one contract before they can be rehired. WashTech speculates that Microsoft may be reducing its reliance on permatemps in part because it is having more difficulty attracting employees, but clearly contract and temp work continues to be widespread at Microsoft and many other firms. “By no means has the settlement or Microsoft’s modified



## Appall-o-Meter

By David Futrelle

### Dr. Doogie Too 7.8

It was cute when Doogie Howser did it. It wasn’t so cute when a real-life teen-doctor wannabe started prescribing medication and ordering medical procedures at an Alexandria, Virginia hospital. The teen-ager, who was 16 at the time, allegedly intercepted telephone pages meant for doctors—then called unsuspecting nurses with his “doctor’s orders,” the *Washington Post* reports.

The hospital insists that the procedures the nurses initiated as a result of the calls were medically “appropriate under the circumstances” and that no one was harmed. Though the nurses apparently didn’t realize anything was wrong, the bogus calls were discovered after one doctor began to suspect someone else was answering his pages.

The boy’s attorney categorically denies the charges, though he does admit that his client did speak with at least one nurse on the fateful night—and that he gave a fake name when she asked who he was. But the teen, who’d previously worked as a volunteer at the hospital, does seem eager to start up his medical career as soon as possible. When police searched the teen’s home they found, among other items, a prescription pad, a lab coat and a list of patients.

### Big Tobacco U. 8.1

Well, you can’t say Big Tobacco doesn’t have a sense of humor. British-American Tobacco, a company presently under investigation by the British government for allegedly smuggling cigarettes into various countries, has decided to help the University of Nottingham build a so-called International Center for Corporate Social Responsibility, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reports.

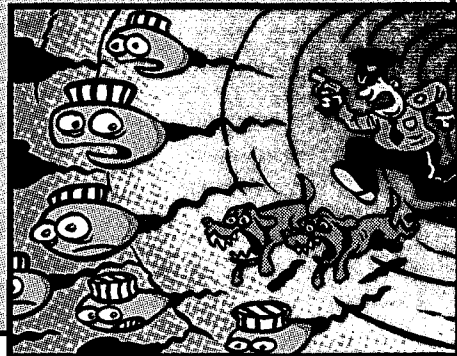
The cash-strapped university has decided to accept the offer—though not without some “soul searching” first. According to a statement by the school administration, the gift will help the school focus more intently on “the social and environmental responsibilities of multinational companies to the communities in which they operate.”

That’s not quite enough for some critics, who’ve blasted the university for accepting “cash for ethics,” in the words of Clive Bates, director of the anti-tobacco activist group Action on Smoking and Health. He told the *Chronicle* that British-American Tobacco “has one of the worst records imaginable on corporate social responsibility. The only thing more dispiriting than the offer is the university accepting it.”

### His Boys Can Swim 6.6

Call it the Great Sperm Escape of 1998. A reputed mobster currently serving time in federal prison for racketeering and loan-sharking has been accused of masterminding (along with his wife) a devious (and successful) plot to sneak his sperm out of the prison so his wife could use it to artificially inseminate herself—and, presumably, get started breeding the next generation of gangsters.

Antonio and Maria Parlavacchio, The Associated Press reports, have been indicted in federal court for engineering this most ingenious jailbreak; three former prison guards also have been charged. “Federal Prosecutor Wayne P. Samuelson says he does not know whether attempts at artificial insemination were successful,” AP reports. “Parlavacchio ... was cited this week for conspiracy, bribery and three counts of illegally possessing sperm kits for artificial insemination. His wife was charged with three counts of providing the kits.”



TERRY LABAN



behavior fixed everything or addressed the real, legitimate needs faced by contract or regular employees at Microsoft," Blain says. "It's different and better than it was, and it was due to the lawsuit and organizing that WashTech has done."

Strong agreed that despite the victory, businesses continue to find ways to deprive workers of pay, benefits and other rights by using employment agencies or setting up discriminatory classifications. "This could be just another round in a long battle," Strong says.

But it was, nonetheless, a welcome victory. ■

## Hard Times

### Seattle's newspapers won't negotiate with striking workers

By Jeff Shaw

SEATTLE—With the arrival of the holidays, striking newspaper workers at the *Seattle Times* and the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* are hunkering down for the long haul. After December talks ended in an impasse, no end is in sight.

Nearly 1,000 workers from the two papers have been walking the picket lines since midnight on November 21 in a dispute over pay and benefits focusing on the lowest-paid workers. Strikers say that newspaper management—which made a final offer to the union in July and hasn't blinked since—is refusing to make the compromises necessary for a deal. "They just haven't engaged in good-faith bargaining," says Art Thiel, a *P-I* sports columnist and Pacific Northwest Newspaper Guild spokesman. "You can't shake hands with one hand."

Like many two-newspaper cities, the *Times* and the *P-I* are linked by a federally approved joint operating agreement. Though the newsrooms are separate, advertising and circulation staff are

shared, with ad revenue split between the two companies. The *P-I* is a Hearst Corporation paper, while the *Times* is owned by the Blethen family.

While executives at the papers claim their pay scales are competitive, the union says otherwise. Over the past 10 years, the local cost of living in Seattle has skyrocketed—the consumer price index increased by 43.9 percent—while wages at the *Times* and the *P-I* rose just 21 percent, the Guild reports, failing to keep pace with inflation.

"Management refuses to recognize that this is an expensive market," says Justin Edison, a copy aide with the *Post-Intelligencer*. So expensive, in fact, that workers who come from places where the cost of living is lower—like St. Paul, Minnesota, where Edison moved from a year ago—effectively take a pay cut to join the *Times* or *P-I* staff.

Additionally, neither offers rank-and-file employees matching funds for their 401(k) retirement plans—a practice that is standard even for small local newspapers. *Times* spokeswoman Kerry Coughlin argues that the paper already offers a "Cadillac" pension plan, and she says employees can keep pace with inflation by meeting the performance incentives built in to the current pay structure. That's not enough for the

with a \$3.25 raise phased in over three years. Thiel points out that it's the union that has done all the offer modifications thus far. "We've gone 95 yards," he says. "All we're asking is the company come that final five yards."

Indeed, the Guild has shown repeatedly that it is willing to negotiate, both before and after the picket lines formed. The union made its last offer before the strike—an offer met with silence from the company. Based on this unyielding posture, the Guild filed an unfair labor claim with the National Labor Relations Board on December 15.

The main reason the paper won't shift its offer, Coughlin says, is to avoid further labor unrest. Several bargaining units at the paper are not out on strike, and improving the *Times'* original offer would "not leave us in a good situation with our other unions."

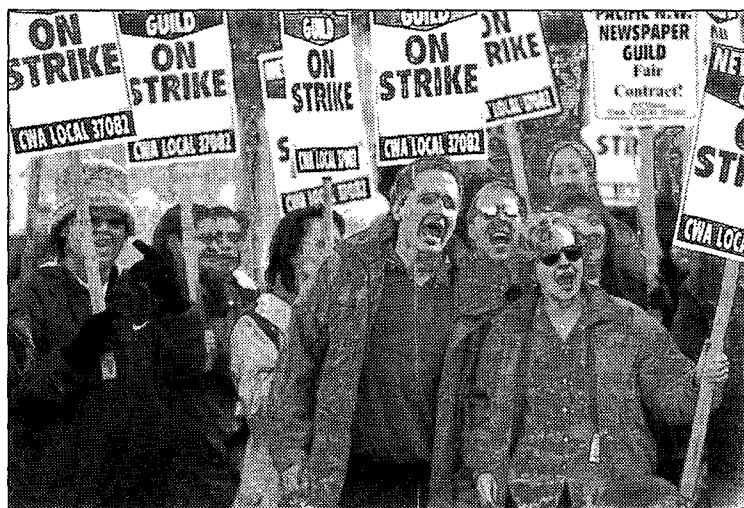
Though management has been dragging its heels on negotiating, they've been on the offensive in terms of public relations. Letters from *Times* publisher Frank Blethen and columns from executive editor Mike Fancher and editorial page editor Mindy Cameron blasted the union on several fronts. Cameron is highly critical of what she calls a "stupid strike," adding that management sees no near-term settlement to the labor dispute. "It's

in nobody's best interests," she says. "There will be no winners here."

The local alternative weekly *The Stranger* has criticized the Guild for not aggressively responding to the company's PR brickbats. Guild representatives say they've chosen to take the high road up to this point. "People have been restrained because we care about the paper, and we assumed the paper cared about its employees," says Guild spokeswoman Keiko Morris, an education

reporter for the *Times*. "We realize now that the company is trying to push us to the wall, so people are digging in."

That means going forward with a subscription cancellation campaign and an advertiser boycott. While the union was reluctant to take such measures, given



Pulitzer-winning writer Eric Nalder (center) pickets with fellow strikers.

union, which says wages should outpace the cost of living on their own.

A huge rift exists between the last two competing offers. The *Times'* offer—in place since last summer—is a \$3.30 across-the-board hourly raise phased in over six years. The Guild countered

that dipping circulation numbers and advertising revenues could hurt workers once a settlement is reached, management's refusal to budge put the Guild in a position where maximum economic pressure was required. "The whole concept of bargaining is that you don't end up where you start," Morris says. "But they haven't moved since day one. We're willing to budge, but it's hard when the other side isn't negotiating."

As the dispute drags on, bitterness between the two sides is inevitable. Already, financial concerns are rearing their heads for employees, forcing many to seek part-time employment elsewhere. Award-winning *P-I* television critic John Levesque, among others, has started working part-time at the post office to augment his \$200-a-week strike pay. In the meantime, the strikers put out their own thrice-weekly paper, the *Seattle Union Record* ([www.unionrecord.com](http://www.unionrecord.com))—which takes its name from a labor-backed journal produced during the Seattle general strike of 1919, when workers brought the city to a halt for five days.

For their part, the *Times* and *P-I* continue to publish by using management personnel, temporary replacement employees—and a small number of union members who chose to cross the lines. Those last few have drawn the ire of strikers. "I think these people who crossed the picket line betrayed me and all these other people," says Scott Sunde, a *P-I* reporter.

Even if the dispute is settled tomorrow, those sentiments will remain. That's one of the few facts management and labor agree on. Sunde says he "supposes there will be some tension—though this is an undiscovered country for everyone."

Cameron, for her part, says "with deep sadness" that she thinks relations between management and employees "will never be the same."

That may be especially true now, since the *Times* announced on December 20 that it would begin hiring permanent replacements for the striking employees. The *P-I* continues to delay this drastic move, which is sure to further drive a wedge of acrimony between labor and management.

The recent history of newspaper strikes isn't pretty. In 1995, 2,400 Newspaper Guild-represented workers at the *Detroit News* and the *Detroit Free*

*Press* walked out—heralding a bitter five-year dispute where both papers hired replacement workers. Both sides absorbed serious damage, with the newspapers losing a combined 288,000 readers and the workers eventually returning to their jobs under essentially the same contract they rejected five years earlier. The papers lost \$112 million during the first 18 months of the strike, which was finally settled on December 18.

While whispers about Detroit are heard among workers, Morris notes there are potential differences that keep Seattle strikers' hopes up. "In that strike, people crossed the picket line early," she says. "If we can hold out and stick together, maybe that will put pressure on the company."

On the picket line, a real sense of optimism prevails—buoyed by the fact that many high-profile reporters and columnists are marching alongside non-newsroom employees. "There's a great feeling of solidarity, that we're all in this ship together," Edison says. "Whether it sinks or swims is up to us." ■

## Can They Make It Through December?

### Senate Republicans back out of minimum wage increase

By Ted Kleine

If you're working behind the cash register at the Piggly Wiggly or trimming hedges at Olde Orchard Estates, you won't be getting a raise this Christmas. George W. Bush is coming to Washington.

In early December, once it became apparent that Bush would accede to the presidency, Senate Republicans backed out on a deal to raise the \$5.15-an-hour minimum wage by \$1 in exchange for \$240 billion in tax cuts. Bush campaigned on a plan to cut taxes by \$1.3 trillion, so his Senate allies decided to wait and go for the big money. "We are operating under the consensus that we could do much better next year," says a spokeswoman for Assistant Majority Leader Don Nickles (R-Okla.).

Will the checkout girls and the lawn boys do better, too? That extra 40 bucks a week would have been enough to make payments on a used car, or buy health insurance for a small family—or pay this hard winter's heating bills, which are expected to be 50 percent higher than last year's. Instead, a lot of folks may be singing that old Merle Haggard tune, "If We Make It Through December."

If the Republicans hadn't played sextuple-or-nothing with the tax cut proposal, more than 10 million workers might have seen their paychecks edge a little farther away from the poverty line this winter. Half those workers labor full time, and a third are raising children.

GOP senators "will be much less predisposed to support a minimum-wage proposal with a Republican president coming in," predicts Jim Manley, press secretary for Massachusetts Democrat Edward Kennedy, who sponsored the wage increase in the Senate.

The minimum wage is much more popular in the House, where some Republicans have to go home to blue-collar districts. House Speaker Dennis Hastert of Illinois negotiated the \$1-an-hour increase with President Clinton, and still wants to see it passed. "The majority of the House is in favor of increasing the minimum wage," says John Feehery, a spokesman for Hastert.

This gives hope to advocates of a wage increase. The public likes the minimum wage, so an increase may be one of the few bills Democrats and Republicans can agree on, says Larry Michel, an economist with the Economic Policy Institute. "I suspect we'll see it passed," Michel adds. "It's been something that's been pretty hard for Republican moderates to resist."

But so far, Bush has not been very friendly to low-wage workers. In Texas, the minimum wage languishes at \$3.35 an hour. (Some workers, especially in agriculture, are not covered by the federal standard.) But, Manley says, raising the minimum wage would also be a good way for Bush to build goodwill with Democrats. "Kennedy feels that if Governor Bush is serious about reaching across the aisle," Manley says, "then a minimum-wage bill would be a good way to start."

You guys cleaning the grease trap at White Castle? Hang on until spring—if you can. ■



# Civil Rights in Reverse

I was in Washington on December 1, on that long-ago chilly morning when eager-beaver legal observers awoke from sleeping overnight on the Supreme Court steps. People lined up to watch oral arguments in the first round of *Bush v. Gore* and talked breathlessly to NPR reporters about enduring cold winter hours to watch "history being made."

A month later, the Supreme Court's holy status has taken a beating in some quarters. "The God that Failed" was the headline of *The Nation's* editorial on the December 12 verdict. "So much for states' rights," quipped the *Washington Post's* E. J. Dionne. The Rev. Jesse Jackson and AFL-CIO President John Sweeney noted "a disturbing irony" that the court used the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause to throw out some 185,000 disproportionately African-American votes for fear that a manual vote count might be unfair.

The sense that the court broke with their judicial philosophy in a nakedly partisan move to select George W. Bush for president fueled the fury of Gore backers. "The Supreme Court has spent the last 50 years shaping equal-protection jurisprudence to redress history's racial horrors," former judge and MIT political science Professor Margaret Burnham wrote in the *Boston Globe*. "However ineffectual that civil rights project was, the court is now in vivid reverse."

But this should have come as no surprise. When it comes to civil rights, the court's gears have been stuck in reverse for a decade. Since Clarence Thomas joined the court in 1991, the Rehnquist Five (with Justices Scalia, Kennedy and O'Connor) have accepted challenges to the federal government's right to enforce all sorts of laws. Specifically, they've challenged laws that offered recourse to victims of discrimination (women, the elderly, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities), usually coming down for states and against the federal government. Most recently, in *United States v. Morrison*, the 5-to-4 majority declared that a provision of the Violence Against Women Act which

enabled women to sue in federal court was an overreach by Congress that "trespassed" on "states' rights."

But the "states' rights" shorthand can be misleading. At times the same conservative majority has trampled all over states' rights. Most spectacularly, they've



stomped on efforts to redraw congressional districts in a way that might increase black voting power. In 1993, in the case of *Shaw v. Reno*, the North Carolina legislature, seeking to comply with the Voting Rights Act, created two majority-black congressional districts out of its total of 12. There had not been a black member of Congress from North Carolina since Reconstruction, and the new apportionment resulted in two black representatives—still less than the black proportion of the state population.

Nonetheless, when five white voters challenged the newly created districts, the Supreme Court ruled in their favor, saying the redistricting grouped blacks solely on the basis of race and thus bore an "uncomfortable resemblance to political apartheid."

A similar North Carolina case went back to the court for the fourth time this fall. "When it comes to redistricting, this Supreme Court has repeatedly violated state prerogatives in order to protect white majorities against perceived discrimination," says Gene Nichol, dean of the University of North Carolina Law School.

As for the 14th Amendment, Bush's lawyers have turned "equal protection" on its head. While challenges to discrimination against minorities or women have been greeted with utmost skepticism by

the highest court, attorneys like Ted Olson (who argued on behalf of Bush before the Supreme Court) have perfected the art of painting civil rights remedies as discriminatory. Olson made just that case in the 1996 *Hopwood v. University of Texas School of Law*, when he represented a white plaintiff in a challenge that ended affirmative action in Texas.

On December 12, when the Supreme Court used the equal protection clause against those whom it was meant to defend, it wasn't ironic or incongruous—it was standard procedure. Years of ideologically driven lawyering by right-wing firms like Olson's Center for Individual Rights have made an upside-down reading of the 14th Amendment not the exception, but the norm. From redistricting to affirmative action, the Supreme Court has declared racism a thing of the past.

Harvard's Lani Guinier is optimistic that the court's decision itself could trigger reform: "The court's choice of language, explicitly valuing no person's

**From redistricting to affirmative action, the Supreme Court has declared racism a thing of the past.**

vote over another's, may launch a citizens' movement." It might. Florida revealed plenty of alleged violations of the Voting Rights Act to investigate. But while one part of this nation is stunned to discover that the system still needs reform, another portion believes it'll always be the same.

Back in Washington on December 1, not quite a mile from the Supreme Court, I ran into another early-morning crowd. Outside the White House, a team of African-American workers were cutting two-by-fours and plywood to build the inauguration platform. The stage would be finished long before we knew who would come to stand on it, we joked.

But one older worker grumbled: "Slaves built the White House; we build the platform every four years. Won't matter to us, either way." ■

# DUD POKER

## Progressives must play the cards they've been dealt

By David Moberg

**W**ith Republicans controlling the presidency and both houses of Congress for the first time since 1952, it might seem to be a gloomy moment for progressive Democrats and their allies in the labor, environmental, civil rights and other movements. But there is a surprisingly strong sentiment that, besides playing defense, progressives could score some political gains in the next few years.

There are several reasons for cautious optimism. Bush enters office as a weak, wounded president, and Republican congressional control is very slim, subject to Democratic filibuster in the Senate. To win, Bush campaigned as a Clinton Republican, promising progress on health care, education and other traditional Democratic issues.

Given that the majority of voters supported Gore or Nader, and the even stronger majorities supporting progressive views on major social and economic issues, if there is any mandate at all from the voters, it is not for what has been the Republican agenda.

Bush will be under strong pressure to prove that he is a conciliator who can get things done. This creates an opportunity for progressives, who can shift the terrain for any compromise to the left by demonstrating how Bush's proposals serve big money interests and not the average American.

Since Bush will have to contend with a hard-right Republican leadership in Congress, he could be either forced into fights with them, or else have his claims to be a "compassionate conservative" exposed as a fraud, making him politically vulnerable. Without a president as titular party head, the left-leaning Democrats in Congress can also assert more leadership.

**P**rogressives differ on whether they think that much will be accomplished legislatively, but they agree the best way for progressives to block Bush, as well as to lay the groundwork for future political victories, is to promote their issues clearly and aggressively, appealing to a sympathetic public. "This election

made clear the country doesn't want a tax cut for the wealthy or to dismantle health care or Social Security," says AFL-CIO public policy director David Smith. "Of course, we will fight to hold the line on these issues, but it would be an enormous mistake for progressives to think that diving into the bunker is our only option. We also have to press ahead on issues that the country cares about, especially health care. I think we have room to make some progress."

Part of the battle will be defining what constitutes progress or getting things done. "There will be an effort to pick off some Democrats," says Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Illinois), a rising progressive leader in the House. "If we let them define

bipartisanship as a couple of Democrats going their way, then shame on us. It's our role to prevent that kind of rightward drift and make it clear in every forum, including Democratic caucuses, to remind people who the Democratic base is and who created this popular victory for Gore."

There's strong sentiment on the Democratic left that the party needs to define itself more clearly in terms of its fundamental values and philosophy, not just in terms of specific legislative proposals or tactical positions to gain political advantage over the Republicans. If Democrats stand for prin-

ciples that people understand and support, then some strategists think that they cannot only better block unpalatable compromises with the Republican right, but ultimately secure a stronger political position for future elections.

Yet this requires winning over or resisting conservatives in the party, from the "blue dog" faction in Congress to the Democratic Leadership Council. "The Democrats really need to be organized and have a coherent plan that we can get people to unite behind, and that ought to be our focus," says Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio), the new leader of the Progressive Caucus. "It has to be forward-looking and positive. It would be a mistake to lead a frontal assault on Bush now. The real ques-



PAUL BUCK/AFP

**The good-old-boys are back, but Democrats can make the best of it.**



tion is what do we stand for as the Democratic Party. It's not just unity. There needs to be a lot of time and attention paid to re-examining the philosophical basis of our party and to define the social, economic and political pillars of the party."

Kucinich says the debate in Congress recently has been "more about tactics than philosophy" on both sides, but "the answer to rank partisanship is not a pantomime over bipartisanship." Although he believes it's possible to find unity, some of the positions he is currently proposing for the party—such as opposition to national missile defense and nuclear disarmament—will find strong opposition on both sides of the aisle.

Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-Illinois) wants to reorient politics to a debate over fundamental human rights to such goals as health care, education and a clean environment by proposing constitutional amendments guaranteeing those rights. He sees bipartisan compromise between Republicans and conservative Democrats as a major threat, reinforcing tendencies that weaken the Democratic Party and fail to address critical issues. "Progressives fundamentally must challenge not only Republicans, but this coalition of Democrats that gives the impression that we're with the Republican coalition on less taxes, vouchers, deregulation of the environment and the free market approach to almost everything."

Progressives are intent on staking out positions that make it difficult for Bush to muddy the differences on key issues, as he did so successfully with education, a patient's bill of rights, prescription drug coverage for seniors and other issues during the election. If Democrats make the defining issue universal access to health care, Schakowsky says, it will be harder for Bush to persuade people that Democrats and Republicans are indistinguishable.

But Service Employees Union President Andrew Stern, who represents many health care workers, says it may be possible to pass a significant expansion of access to health care short of universal coverage, partly because there's a growing bipartisan view that work should offer more benefits—including health insurance—and both parties promised to use the surplus to expand health care. "We should focus on trying to win for our members and not worry about 2002," Stern says.

Early battles may set the tone. If Sens. John McCain (R-Arizona) and Russ Feingold (D-Wisconsin) push through their campaign finance legislation, as they believe they can, then Bush will immediately be put on the defensive. But if Bush can push issues that were blocked only by a Clinton veto or veto threat, such as abolition of the estate tax, then

Democrats risk being deeply divided over an issue that could otherwise be used to demonstrate how Bush is promoting policies that unfairly help the super-rich.

If a recession hits, Bush has already made it clear that he will use traditional Keynesian arguments to rationalize his proposed \$1.3 trillion tax cut. The progressive alternative should be public investment both as a stimulus to the economy and to do needed work, but the Democrats are ill-positioned for that argument after years of claiming to be champion budget-balancers. "This is the Democrats' most important vulnerability," argues Jeff Faux, president of the Economic Policy Institute. "They have become so unused to arguing for social investment.

It will be very difficult if the unemployment rate starts to rise very significantly, and all they can talk about is maintaining the surplus for Social Security in 2035. That's where Clinton and Gore led them. There will be great pressure to find the lowest common denominator between the New Democrats and progressives."

Ironically, with Clinton out of the White House, progressives may be better positioned to resist fast-track trade negotiating authority and to demand that global economic agreements protect the environment and workers rights. Democrats who were loyal to the White House now may be free to vote for a position that has wide popular support. (Indeed, one even Clinton had started to

embrace at the end of his term, when the administration negotiated a bilateral trade agreement with Jordan that included labor and environmental protections.)

**P**rogressives will have virtually no influence on administrative appointments and executive actions that Bush can take. Under the circumstances, this is where the administration

may do its greatest early damage, stalling or reversing decisions made late in the Clinton administration to protect the environment or set ergonomic standards for workplaces. Clinton managed to make some progress despite a Republican Congress through administrative guidelines, such as one just issued that would permit the federal government to bar contractors that repeatedly violate labor,

environmental and other laws. Bush can favor corporations in much the same way. "In the area of legislation, we can hold our own to an extent because of the lack of a mandate for Bush and the numbers of Democrats in the House and Senate," argues AFSCME President Gerald McEntee. "But of real concern is the power of the executive branch, whether in Health and Human Services, Education or other departments. The president can write regulations and put into effect executive orders and make



Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. sees bipartisan compromise between Republicans and conservative Democrats as a major threat.

MARIO TAMANA/NEWSMAKERS

**"The Democrats have not fostered the grassroots. They have played too much of an inside-the-Beltway strategy."**

appointments. The people who do the day-to-day business that people so often don't see can have a lot of effect."

The key to any progressive strategy will be the ability to mobilize citizen pressure on Congress, including the Democrats. Within the Beltway, the pressures on Democratic leaders will be for compromise and bipartisanship. "That's why we've got to not let these folks, good as they are, to set the tone for us," argues Stewart Acuff, assistant Midwest regional director of the AFL-CIO. "We have to organize around what people need and want and what's just, instead of organizing around what—as much as I love them—Dick Gephardt, David Bonior or Tom Daschle think is viable."

While Sierra Club executive director Carl Pope sees little hope for environmentalists under a Bush administration, he says that it's crucial to change politics over the next few years so that citizens will vote more on their environmental and economic concerns and less on cultural issues. In the short run, he expects tough defensive fights, especially over Bush's proposal to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas exploration. Yet for both the short and long run, he says, "I never count on

leadership from politicians. The public will have to lead on this."

Some members of Congress will welcome such popular pressure, since it can strengthen their hand. Schakowsky thinks Democrats can only make headway by "building the progressive infrastructure and making the progressive voice louder," strengthening their own institutions in Congress and supportive citizens' groups like U.S. Action. "One thing Democrats have not fully taken advantage of is the opportunity to utilize and foster creation of grassroots supporters," she says. "They've played too much of an inside-the-Beltway strategy."

As a result of the way Bush won this election, there's a reservoir of anger, especially in the black community and in union circles, and there is the potential for more popular discontent as the limits of Bush's compassionate conservatism are revealed. If groups on the left can mobilize supporters, and progressive Democrats in Congress can keep their fractious party united around issues that are both popular and populist, then the battle with the Bush administration could lay the groundwork for decisive progressive political—and eventually legislative and electoral—victories in the coming years. ■

# Voting Wrongs

## Blacks won't forget how Bush got elected

By Salim Muwakkil

**T**he Supreme Court ruling that handed George W. Bush the presidency has triggered an explosion of fury among African-Americans that took many pundits by surprise. And many have yet to fully fathom the depth of black America's outrage.

The intensity of the response is being fueled by a combination of factors, but the primary bone of contention is the issue of vote suppression. Widespread charges that Florida's black vote was systematically suppressed, combined with the Supreme Court's ruling to stop counting untallied votes served to remind black Americans that a hard-fought right they supposedly received 35 years ago is still up for grabs.

Blacks' heightened sensitivity to issues of vote suppression should be understandable; their disenfranchisement was status quo until a long and bloody struggle produced the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Anxiety about vanishing voting rights was on full display two years ago when a false rumor sprinted through the African-American community warning that blacks would lose the right to vote when the Voting Rights Act expires in 2007. Black-oriented talk radio shows and Internet chat rooms were awash in fearful projections of our dire, voteless future.

The fearful notion that white Americans can totally disenfranchise black Americans at a moment's notice may be irrational, but it's a fear deeply rooted in the African-

American experience. Thus, the shenanigans in Florida struck an ominous chord in black America. "There is a radical difference between the way whites and blacks perceived the election," notes David Bositis, a senior political analyst for the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a Washington think tank that focuses on issues of special concern to blacks. "Black voters are very angry for the most part. In their minds, the election was stolen by Jeb Bush, by George W. Bush and by the Supreme Court. That sentiment

is widespread, and I don't think this will be soon forgotten."

The Supreme Court's focus on the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution added another dimension of insult to the controversy for African-Americans.

The amendment (one of the Reconstruction-era amendments, along with the 13th and the 15th) was added following the Civil War to expand constitutional protection to former slaves and their progeny. How perverse it is that the nation's top court would now utilize a clause in this amendment to help suppress the votes of the very citizens it was designed to protect. That perversity was given an ironic twist by the silence of Justice Clarence Thomas during the Supreme Court hearings. The lone black member of the court said nothing even to acknowledge the fear and anger of an African-American community still wounded by a history of political exclusion.

**"Black voters are very angry. ... In their minds, the election was stolen by Jeb Bush, by George W. Bush and by the Supreme Court."**



Many commentators have questioned the Supreme Court ruling on grounds that it was inconsistent, even contradictory, in its reasoning. But reports have emerged that raise serious questions about the Justices' conflicts of interest. Thomas' wife Virginia has been head-hunting for the Bush campaign in her capacities as an employee of the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank. An article in the December 25 issue of *Newsweek* reports that Justice Sandra Day O'Connor was visibly upset during an election-night party when she heard Florida was first called for Vice President Al Gore. The article notes that her husband said they had planned to move back to Arizona and retire, but that she could not retire and allow Gore to appoint a Democrat. Furthermore, two of Justice Antonin Scalia's sons, Eugene and John, work for law firms that represented Bush in the Florida dispute.

"The Supreme Court crowned Bush president by their politics, not the people by their votes," the Rev. Jesse Jackson told *In These Times*. "That's undemocratic on its face. But while the political campaign is over, the civil rights struggle to protect the franchise of our vote will continue."

Jackson, who has been a leading figure in the protest surrounding the Florida imbroglio, is planning a series of rallies protesting the actions of Florida election officials and the Supreme Court to be staged across the country during Martin Luther King Day on January 15 and throughout the following week. The protests will culminate with a large demonstration of many groups during Bush's inaugural ceremony on January 20.

For many reactionary commentators, like Rush Limbaugh and Bill O'Reilly of the proudly right-wing Fox News Channel, Jackson has become the focus of slobbering anger. Although he has long served as the right-wing's *bête noir*, his post-election activities have infuriated conservative pundits like nothing in recent years. But Jackson is not the only villain of their story. Right-wing commentators criticized black leadership in general for demonizing Bush.

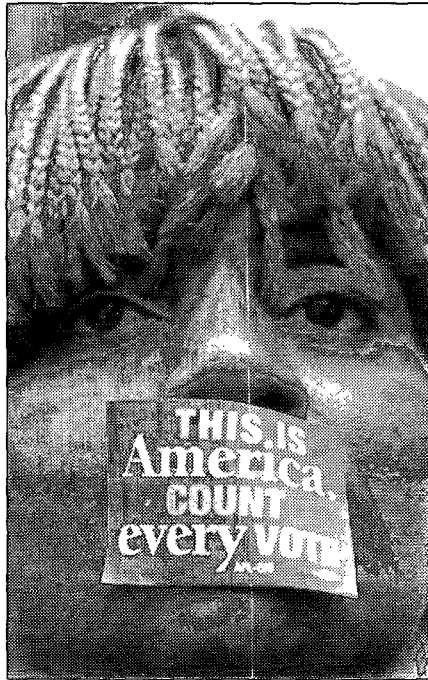
The harshest criticism has been directed at a political ad produced by the NAACP that recalled the 1998 murder of James Byrd Jr., who was killed when two white men dragged him from the back of a truck until his body was torn apart. The NAACP ad featured the voice of Byrd's daughter who said: "When Gov. George W. Bush refused to support hate-crimes legislation, it was like my father was killed all over again." The ad was condemned as too strong even by sympathetic Democrats, but NAACP executive director Kweisi Mfume argued that it was an accurate reflection of the Byrd family's feelings.

It certainly proved to be an effective tool in helping to mobilize the black vote. Nine out of 10 African-Americans voted for Gore, an even higher percentage than for Bill

Clinton, who was enormously popular among blacks. Even in Florida, where African-Americans make up 13 percent of the electorate, the black vote was 16 percent of the total in this election. Figures on black turnout were comparably high across the country. Political analysts cite the large black turnout for ensuring Democratic senatorial victories in Missouri, Pennsylvania, New York and Michigan.

After this belligerent political season, black activists and political leaders are busily preparing an agenda framed by a Bush administration. The Congressional Black Caucus, chaired by Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-Texas), has already declared its solidarity with those civil rights groups demanding an investigation of vote suppression in Florida. "There will be a far-reaching emphasis on justice in the caucus," says Johnson spokesman Cedric Mobley, "starting with voting rights, ensuring that every vote counts, and ensuring that we never ever have a situation like we have now—where attempts to harass and intimidate minority voters went unchallenged, and where antiquated voting equipment and ballots make it impossible for people to cast legitimate votes."

Events surrounding election 2000 have energized the African-American community and many activists see an opportunity to jump-start the stalled but still necessary black freedom movement. With Republicans in control of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, black organizers have their work cut out for them. Pundits who are not blinded by the sweat of ideological fervor understand that Jesse Jackson's post-election rhetoric was not just a product of his own hyperbolic tendencies, but an accurate reflection of black Americans' justifiable anger. He understands that African-Americans' anger must be channeled into political challenges to GOP hegemony in the 2002 elections. Black leadership undoubtedly will find it difficult to maintain this emotional intensity for two years, but the judicial coup that gave America President Bush has made the job significantly easier. ■



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# UNCLE TOM'S CABINET?

## A few black faces at the top won't quell the outrage at the bottom

By Barbara Ransby and Cheryl I. Harris

**I**t is a sad, ironic testimony to the current complexities of racial politics in America that African-Americans like Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice can attain unprecedented career advances in tandem with the sweeping disenfranchisement of thousands of black voters.

The Bush victory enabled these two loyal Bush family (White) house servants to become some of the most powerful blacks in the nation at the expense of the rights of black voters and the ratification of the theft by the Supreme Court. Now it appears the constitutional mandate of equal protection requires that the rights of some voters (guess who?) be ignored in order to protect the rights of others.

The NAACP and other civil rights groups have conducted hearings in Florida that document outrageous instances of voter disenfranchisement.

Haitians were denied translators to help them decipher confusing ballots. Roadblocks turned prospective voters away from access roads to the polls. Black men were singled out for criminal background checks as they headed to polling stations. This is all in addition to the highly publicized chicanery and technological "glitches" that excluded some 185,000 Florida ballots, in an election in which record numbers of African-Americans voted (and many more tried).

However, some of the most deep-seated aspects of black disenfranchisement in the state are structural and predate the recent election debacle. Some 400,000 black men in Florida are permanently barred from voting because of a 19th century law disenfranchising those with a felony conviction. This 1868 law dates back to after passage of the 15th Amendment, which gave black men the franchise. A century later the targets are the same, and the law is working the way it was intended.

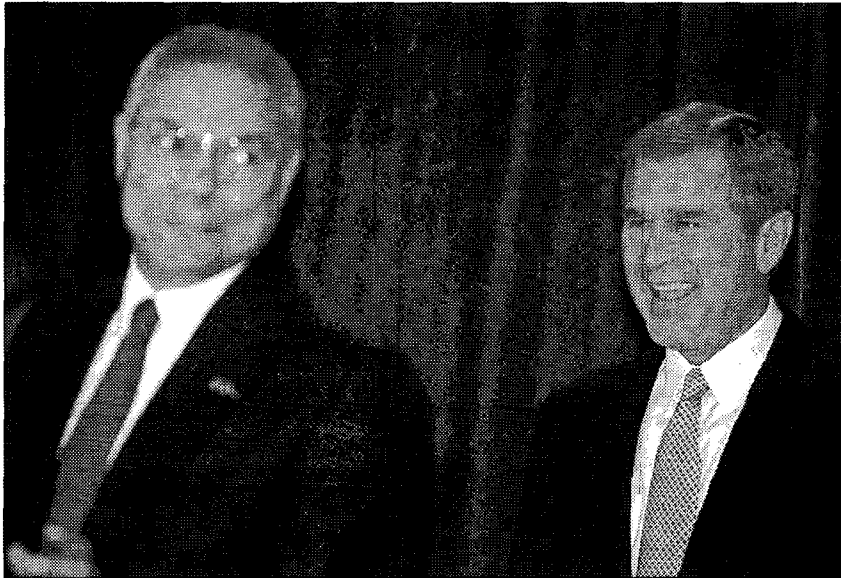
Given the flagrant racism that permeated the election and its aftermath, it was a strategic move when, just days after Gore's concession, a smiling Dubya proudly announced his diverse senior nominees, nudging first Rice (for national security adviser) and then Powell (for secretary of state) before the cameras to sing his praises. Even before the Supreme Court handed victory to Bush, he had indicated that these two

would be some of his first appointments. This is no coincidence; it is another example of what the Republicans really mean by "colorblindness." Colorblindness means that we should all pretend that race played no role in selecting high-ranking black people to speak for a regime whose commitments to racial justice are seriously suspect at best.

Consistent with this strategy, on December 20 Bush met with a national group of religious leaders, a third of them African-American, to further deflect attention away from the persistent and persuasive allegations of racism. Eugene Rivers, a Boston-based minister who describes himself as an independent, emerged from that meeting to criticize Jesse Jackson for challenging the fairness of the election.

Although trying to authenticate more conservative blacks to speak for the race is old news, the choices of Powell and Rice do represent a shift in the way in

which racism manifests itself. These nominations would have been inconceivable a generation ago. But the black community has changed, and the face of racism has too. There is a greater tolerance of phenotype diversity, as long as there is conformity in terms of ideology and loyalty. Indeed, such symbolic integration at the top can be valuable as long as the black symbols remain faithful promoters of the party line.



JOE RAEDLE/NEWSMAKERS

**The nomination of brown faces cannot disguise the sentiments of the overwhelming majority of African-Americans.**



For example, while Powell differs with Bush on affirmative action, which the general benefited from, he is obviously still willing to be a team player to advance his own career interests. This is Bush's version of affirmative action—or "affirmative access," as he calls it—brown faces at the top as long as they go along with the silencing of black sentiments at the bottom.

The pioneer for this new style racism was Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, one of the strongest supporters of the conservative opinion in the Florida decision. What all three of these black conservatives show us is the limits of representation at the top. Despite their backgrounds, they have conveniently forgotten the struggles from which they benefited. Thomas was the product of impoverished southern farmers. Powell came from a working-class immigrant family. And Rice, born the year of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, was a classmate of one of the children killed in the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama by white vigilantes. Yet all three have twisted and reconfigured those experiences to justify current positions that would ignore the brutal forms of discrimination and oppression facing the masses of black folk without access to the privileges and power that they now enjoy.

In the end, neither Clarence Thomas, Colin Powell nor Condoleezza Rice can disguise the sentiments of the overwhelming majority of African-Americans. Ninety percent of the black electorate voted against George Bush in this election. They did so with good reason, given that his policy objectives portend even deeper retrenchment in the areas of civil rights enforcement, economic justice and other areas of concern to black communities all over the country. "If Bush intends to hold out a conciliatory hand to the black community," says Fran Beal, a civil rights activist and leader of the Black Radical Congress, "he needs to first condemn the blatant disenfranchisement of tens of thousands of black and Haitian people and rigorously move to enforce the Voting Rights Act of 1965."

The Republicans hoped to dampen the outrage of African-Americans with jobs for black elites and Booker T. Washington-type access to uncritical African-American leaders. But folk won't be fooled so easily. ■

Barbara Ransby is an assistant professor of African-American Studies and History at University of Illinois, Chicago. Cheryl L. Harris is a professor of law at the University of California, Los Angeles.

# SUPREME INJUSTICE

## Only five votes counted in the end

By John K. Wilson

While thousands of legal votes in Florida went untallied, only five votes counted in the end: those of the conservative wing of the U.S. Supreme Court, which declared George W. Bush the new president. Rarely has the Supreme Court ever issued such an incompetently argued and plainly political decision, one that blithely ignored the Constitution, Florida law, and the very principles of deference to state autonomy that the far-right justices have fearlessly defended in their years on the bench.

Although the Supreme Court's failure to follow the laws doomed Al Gore's chances, the vice president bears the ultimate responsibility for a failed campaign both before and after November 7. Gore lost in the courts for the same reasons he failed to win a majority of the votes on Election Day: Gore's campaign was more concerned about public relations than making serious arguments needed to gain the support for victory.

Just as Gore lost the confidence of voters by moving to the center, blindly following the polls and failing to stand with integrity on key political issues, so too did the Gore campaign lose the legal challenge because of its desire to pander to the media.

The first mistake was the Gore campaign's obsession with the protest phase rather than the more winnable contest phase, where the broad provisions of Florida law permit the courts to create any remedy deemed necessary. But the Gore lawyers pushed the Florida Supreme Court to extend the protest phase deadline, and lost several days that proved crucial in the end.

The second major mistake was sending David Boies, an antitrust lawyer with little experience before the Supreme Court, to argue Gore's case. Boies may have been successful as the face of the Gore campaign in the court of public opinion, but he failed miserably before the highest court. The views of the swing justices were not completely unpredictable. The fact that Justice Antonin Scalia had cited the equal protection argument prominently in his concurrence should have

**The justices desired a Bush victory so deeply that almost anything David Boies said wouldn't have mattered in the end.**

been a hint, and the Gore lawyers must have realized the need to sway Anthony Kennedy or Sandra Day O'Connor. Yet the Gore brief was nothing more than a rehashing of the same old arguments that had already proven so ineffective.

Boies could have proposed a resolution for the concerns about the equal protection clause. Instead, Boies actually

seemed to strengthen the Bush team's argument that hand recounts were an arbitrary and unfair system demanding judicial intervention. The worst moment in the oral arguments came when Boies, apparently suffering from a bout of temporary insanity, confessed that the vote-counting standards in Florida varied not only from county to county, but "can vary from individual to individual."

Ironically, despite all of the conservative complaints about the Florida courts illegally "inventing" new law, in the end the Supremes attacked the judges only for failing to invent enough new law: If the Florida Supreme Court had imposed a specific uniform standard for hand counting, the decision might have gone the other way—or at the very least, the U.S. Supreme Court majority would have been forced to come up with a different excuse to begin the Bush presidency.

Boies also failed to make the key point before the court that December 12 was not a compelling legal deadline (he even endorsed the "safe harbor" deadline at one point). The invention of this date as the final deadline was the majority's worst mistake, and proved to be the ultimate undoing of the Gore candidacy.

Chief Justice William Rehnquist's argument about "deadline" looked more like a transcript of a call to a psychic hotline than statutory construction: "Surely when the Florida Legislature empowered the courts of the State to grant 'appropriate' relief, it must have meant relief that would have become final by the cut-off date." But

Rehnquist did not explain how he intuited why the Florida Legislature would demand to meet this deadline that is unmentioned in state law, even when it would mean breaking the specific state laws requiring a contest phase remedy.

Gore's final error was failing to fight this ruling. After all, the majority noted that "a desire for speed is not a general excuse for ignoring equal protection guarantees," and then falsely used lack of time as the excuse to ignore these guarantees in Florida. Instead of conceding, if Gore had convinced the Florida Supreme Court to clarify that December 12 was not the deadline, then O'Connor and Kennedy—who claimed to rely upon the Florida ruling—would have been forced to allow the counting.

Boies' incompetence doesn't excuse the willingness of the Supreme Court to ignore the law and precedent in its pursuit of a political victory. And the justices desired a Bush victory so deeply that almost anything Boies said wouldn't have mattered in the end.

The Supreme Court waded into the Florida swamp and created a constitutional crisis, when the truth instead might have been discovered, and the law upheld. In a cruel irony, the conservative justices who have been indifferent to the cause of equality actually had the gall to cite cases where the court overturned racist rulings of state courts as a reason not to count these Florida undervotes, which were disproportionately cast by minorities and the poor due to outmoded punchcard voting machines that had an error rate five times that of optical scan machines.

Why did these five Republican-appointed justices work so hard to ignore the law and ensure that Bush would become president? It's impossible to ignore the partisan and ideological biases involved. While the Florida Supreme Court would not be affected by the election outcome, the U.S. Supreme Court justices certainly will be. Scalia is hoping to replace Rehnquist as chief justice. The conservatives on the court want Bush appointees who will give them a working majority.

Justice John Paul Stevens became unusually personal in his dissent when he seemed to hint at the court's bias: "Although we may never know with complete certainty the identity of the winner of this year's presidential election, the identity of the loser is perfectly clear. It is the nation's confidence in the judge as an impartial guardian of the rule of law."

Unfortunately when the guardians in the Supreme Court choose not to obey the rule of law, there is no one to guard them. ■

John K. Wilson ([johnkwilson@postmark.net](mailto:johnkwilson@postmark.net)) is the author of *How the Left Can Win Arguments and Influence People: A Tactical Manual for Pragmatic Progressives* (NYU Press).



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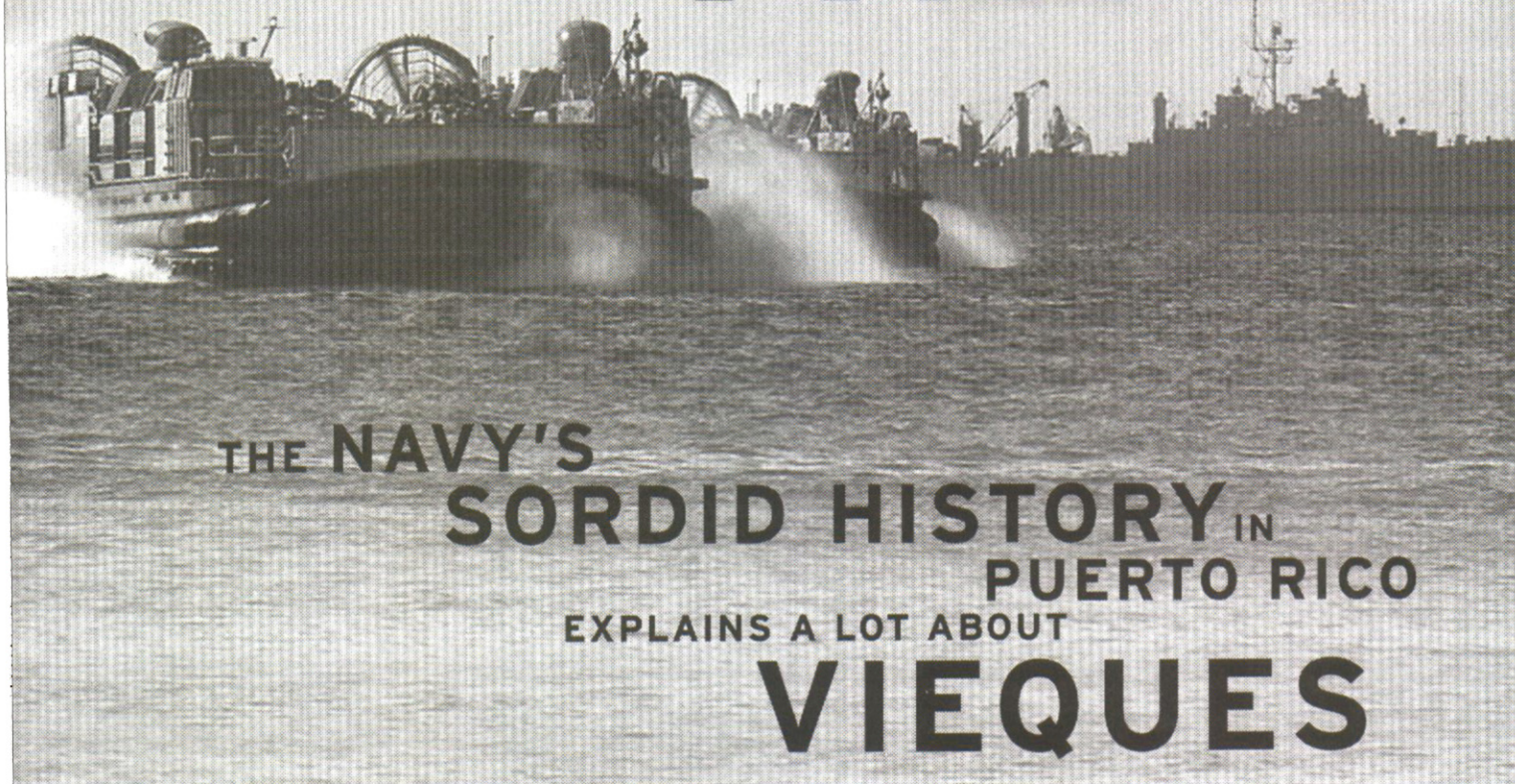
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# ANCHORS AWAY



## THE NAVY'S SORDID HISTORY IN PUERTO RICO EXPLAINS A LOT ABOUT VIEQUES

BY JUAN GONZALEZ

**Ships landing at the Camp Garcia Naval Base on Vieques.**

**W**ithin days of his inauguration, George W. Bush is almost certain to face a new confrontation with the government and people of Puerto Rico over the U.S. Navy's 60-year-old bombing practice range on the island of Vieques. The Vieques dispute, which briefly attracted major media attention in late 1999, promptly disappeared from most radar screens in this country after President Clinton reached a compromise agreement on January 31 with Puerto Rican Gov. Pedro Rossello. But the controversy never went away for the 3.8 million U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico who inhabit this nation's last major colonial possession. And unless President Clinton acts before Bush is inaugurated, the dispute may become the new president's first foreign policy crisis.

Vieques is the most glaring example today of an imperial arrogance that has been part of the Navy since American sailors first began patrolling foreign waters in the early 19th century. It is also the most recent example of a well-established but little examined tradition in the Navy of top officers challenging civilian control. At least that's the conclu-

sion reached in the new book *Foxardo 1824* by Jesus Davila, one of Puerto Rico's most respected journalists.

Davila's book examines an almost-forgotten 1824 scandal in which one of the Navy's earliest heroes, Commodore David Porter, led 200 sailors in an unauthorized surprise attack on the Puerto Rican town of Fajardo. Porter's subsequent court-martial for that incident created a national furor, with the proceedings of his trial front-page news for months, and with Porter orchestrating an extraordinary campaign to win public sympathy, including publishing a book in his own defense. Prior to the court-martial, he even leveled criticisms against President John Quincy Adams and the secretary of the Navy. This prompted the Navy to add insubordination to its list of charges against Porter, turning him into the most prominent 19th-century example of a naval officer defying civilian authority.

But before delving further into the Porter's amazing story and how it relates to the Vieques controversy, we first need to understand what is happening right now with Vieques. The Clinton-Rossello agreement ended all live bombing on

JOSE JIMENEZ/PRIMERA HORA/AFP



Vieques and provided a three-year transition period for the Navy to find another practice site. However, it permitted the Navy to conduct a reduced number of training exercises with inert bombs and dummy ammunition; and it called for a complete Navy pullout by May 2003, only if the people of Vieques voted for that withdrawal in a referendum. The agreement stipulated that the Navy would decide the date of the referendum—which has been set for November 6, 2001—and would provide \$40 million in development assistance to Vieques, presumably to win support for being allowed to stay.

of the New Progressive Party, and Ruben Berrios, head of the Puerto Rican Independence Party, and the three leaders sent a joint letter to Clinton calling for an immediate withdrawal of the Navy from Vieques. Calderon promised that her first official act as governor would be to organize a referendum separate from the Navy's that would include the immediate withdrawal of the Navy as an option. In effect, she declared the Clinton-Rossello agreement dead.

Amazingly, Clinton admitted as much himself during an Election Day interview with Amy Goodman, my co-host on the Pacifica Radio network's news show *Democracy Now!* Asked by Goodman about Vieques, Clinton said:

This training that is going on now is subsequent to an agreement. Now the Republicans in Congress broke the agreement, and instead of giving the Western part of the island to Puerto Rico, gave it to the Interior Department to manage. If I can't find a way to give that island, the western part of the island, back to the people of Puerto Rico, and to honor the agreement that the government of Puerto Rico itself made with the support of the local leaders, including the mayor of Vieques, then the people of Puerto Rico I think have a right to say the federal government broke its word, and the training has to stop right now.

Clinton went further than just blaming congressional Republicans, however. He made it clear that he backed a full Navy withdrawal:

I think the training should stop because the people don't want it there. But we need a place to train, and we are in the process of finding another place.



The leaders of Puerto Rico's three main parties, including newly elected Gov. Sila Calderon (center), sent a letter to President Clinton demanding an immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vieques.

It also called for 8,000 acres of Navy land to be turned over to the government of Puerto Rico.

From the moment it was announced, the agreement faced widespread criticism, both in Puerto Rico among those who wanted an immediate Navy withdrawal, and in this country from the Navy's staunchest supporters in Congress who opposed giving up the range. On the island, several huge demonstrations were organized by a coalition of church groups, and hundreds of people were arrested throughout the year for civil disobedience on the range in attempts to disrupt maneuvers. But it wasn't until Election Day that the full impact of the Clinton-Rossello agreement became clear.

While throughout the United States, most people were fixed on the presidential race and the Florida recount, few noticed that down in Puerto Rico, opponents of the Vieques agreement had swept to an amazing victory. Rossello's pro-statehood New Progressive Party, which had backed the agreement, lost virtually everything—its majority in both houses of the Puerto Rican legislature, the governor's mansion and the post of resident commissioner, the island's nonvoting delegate to the House of Representatives.

Popular Democratic Party leader Sila Calderon was narrowly elected Puerto Rico's first woman governor, and the polls showed that her strong opposition to the Vieques agreement was what provided her margin of victory. Within days after the election, Calderon met with Carlos Pesquera, head

If the president, as commander-in-chief, supports the majority view in Puerto Rico that the Navy must withdraw, then why is the Navy scheduling a referendum on the question?

The answer comes from Clinton himself. New York labor leader Dennis Rivera, who has spearheaded the pro-Vieques movement in the city's Puerto Rican community, has met with the president several times over this issue. According to Rivera, Clinton told him recently that the White House was threatened with "several resignations" by Navy officials if he ordered an immediate closing of the bombing range.

At least one White House official has confirmed the resignation threats to me. Other Clinton aides have been saying privately for months that no matter how the president may feel personally about Vieques, the Navy brass wields far more influence with Capitol Hill on the issue, especially since Congress must approve all transfers of military bases. In the Senate, Virginia Republican John Warner, head of the Armed Services Committee and a former secretary of the Navy, has been among the strongest opponents of giving up the Vieques range. In effect, the admirals and other Pentagon brass have quietly and successfully defied the commander-in-chief on Vieques for more than a year.

But this type of defiance is not new for the Navy, as Davila discovered while researching *Foxardo 1824*. The book, which was published in Spanish in June and is already in its third printing, is a product of Puerto Rico's nonprofit Historical



Journalism Project, a collaborative effort of the Catholic Church and the Ateneo Puertorriqueno, the island's oldest private academic and literary forum.

Davila spent nine months studying military archives in the United States, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Spain and Venezuela, in an attempt to piece together a historical picture of Navy operations in the Caribbean, one that might explain why the admirals and generals in the Pentagon keep insisting that Vieques is the only island in the Atlantic suitable as a bombing and training site for American troops.

## THE PRESIDENT MUST SEPARATE

In the process he came across the Foxardo Affair. When the incident occurred, David Porter was already a naval hero having distinguished himself in both the Barbary War and the War of 1812. His daring voyage into the Pacific to attack British ships during the latter conflict led Washington Irving to extol him as "our modern Sinbad." By 1824, Porter had been promoted to Commodore of the Gulf of Mexico, West Indies and the Coast of Africa, and the main job of his squadron was to drive pirates from the Caribbean.

That November his squadron was stationed in St. Thomas when Porter learned that one of his lieutenants had been arrested in the nearby Puerto Rican town of Fajardo and deported by Spanish troops. Porter promptly gathered several of his ships and landed 200 men at Fajardo's port. There, he destroyed two gun batteries and threatened to raze the entire town unless the local mayor produced those who had detained his lieutenant and made the culprits apologize. When a contingent of Spanish troops arrived, Porter's men retreated. The Spanish government, which was then an ally of the United States, lodged a protest that led to his court-martial. The attack on Fajardo ended up being called the "Foxardo Incident" by Navy Brass who routinely misspelled Spanish names.

Porter published a lengthy defense of his actions in 1825, in which he claimed that he attacked the town while pursuing pirates who had stolen goods from merchants in St. Thomas. Puerto Rico was a notorious haven for pirates, he insisted, one that Spain could not control, and that gave the United States the right to punish the island. The Commodore called on the public to choose between him and the government. As for Puerto Rico, Porter wrote: "It is the duty of all nations to unite with us, to treat the people of Porto Rico [sic] as the enemies of the human race."

But Judge Advocate Richard S. Coxe, who prosecuted Porter, reached a far different conclusion in his public report. According to Coxe, the lieutenant whose arrest had touched off the incident had landed in Puerto Rico in civilian clothes without proper identification and had been properly expelled by Puerto Rican authorities. As for Porter, Coxe concluded that his story was so full of contradictions as to be unbelievable, and that the Commodore had no justification or authority to launch his attack. Porter was convicted, but because of his war record, he was slapped with only a six-month suspension. The scandal proved enough, however, to end his Navy career. The bitter Commodore resigned, moved to Mexico and enlisted in the Mexican navy as commander of its fleet.

The disgraced Porter took his son, David Dixon Porter, with

him to Mexico. Years later, David Dixon Porter returned to the United States and followed in his father's footsteps by joining the Navy, becoming a hero during the Civil War along with his adopted brother, David Farragut. The two brothers, in fact, were the first two admirals of the U.S. Navy. After the Civil War, David Dixon Porter took command of the Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland. He is considered the man who turned the school into the elite institution it is today, and is recognized as the founder of the Navy's historical tradition. He went on to serve as undersecretary of the Navy and its chief administrator. Meanwhile, Farragut was named chief of naval operations and became the mentor of Alfred T. Mahan, the Navy's most influential theoretician during the age of imperialism.

Neither brother, however, forgot how their father had been treated by John Quincy Adams and the civilian politicians of his day. In a biography written years later, David Dixon Porter insisted that his father had fought for the national good but had been subjected to political persecution. Mahan painted a similar view in a biography he wrote of Farragut. To this day, the textbooks on Naval history used at Annapolis portray David Porter in the Foxardo Affair as the victim of civilian

## THE INTERESTS OF A NATION

## FROM THE OBSESSIONS OF ITS ADMIRALS.

leaders who targeted the brave Commodore for what was at best over-eagerness. Such revisionist history has been taught to each new class of Annapolis students since the late 19th century.

When a squadron of Navy ships bombarded the port of San Juan in May 1898 during the Spanish-American War, the ship assigned to lead the bombardment was none other than the U.S.S. *Porter*. After U.S. troops occupied Puerto Rico during that war, Navy officials immediately began lobbying to set up a base just south of the town of Fajardo and west of the island of Vieques. The Navy did not get its wish until World War II, when Roosevelt Roads Naval Base and the Vieques training range were established. Ever since then, the Navy has used military exercises at Vieques as the final graduation ceremony for its officers as they head for the real world of combat.

So what does all this forgotten naval history have to do with the present Vieques controversy? We often forget, as Jesus Davila reminds us, that institutions are built by people, and the traditions of those institutions are passed from one generation to the other by the men and women who compile the stories and make the official record. In the case of Puerto Rico and the island of Vieques, the tradition reaches far back to the early days of the Navy itself. In a strange way, one that most Americans barely understand, Puerto Rico's modern history always has been entwined with that of the Navy.

But a civilian commander-in-chief, whether his name is Clinton or Bush, must learn, like John Quincy Adams once did, to separate fact from fiction, to separate the interests of a nation from the obsessions of its admirals. On January 22, two days after Bush's inauguration, the Navy has scheduled new maneuvers for its Vieques training range.

In Puerto Rico, where people respond to a different tradition, more protests are expected, only this time the newly elected island government will be on the side of the protesters. President Bush thus will face his first foreign test near the same Puerto Rican town where Commodore Porter failed his in 1824. ■

# Into the Abyss

## All-Out Destruction Looms in Colombia

By Ana Carrigan

### BOGOTÁ

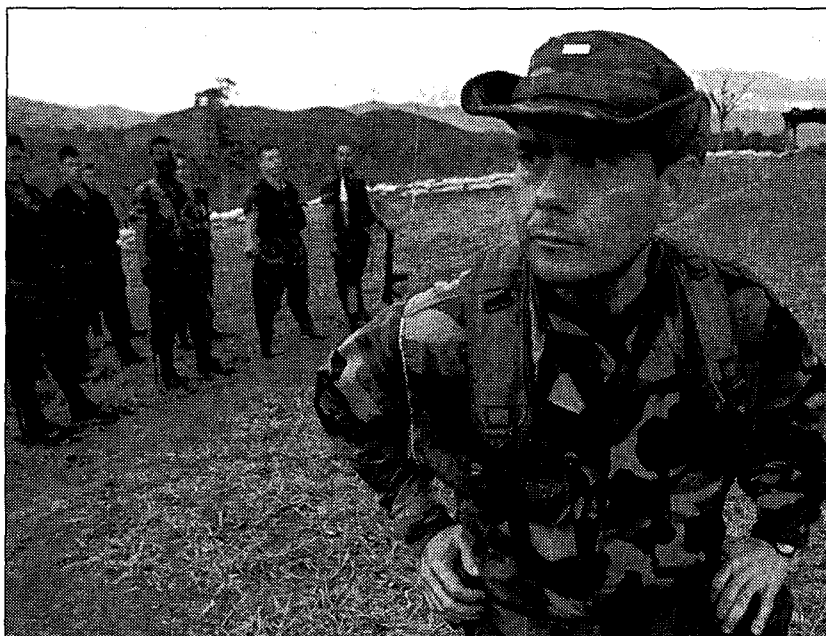
**D**ecember is the best month of the year in Bogotá. The days are sunny, warm and bright, the nights crisp and clear, and at 9,000 feet the light vibrates with burning intensity in the thin mountain air. For a few miraculously cloud- and smog-free weeks, it is even possible to see on the horizon the Andean ranges that encircle this capital city.

December is also a time when people everywhere put down their tools and devote themselves to celebrating the festive season with tropical intensity. In the midst of their troubles, Colombians retain a zest for life, an ability to seize pleasure from the fleeting moment that is one of the attractions of this endlessly complex and contradictory country. This year, however, the holiday spirit has been submerged by an undertow of dread.

The Colombian peace process is disintegrating. There are many reasons why this is so. First, there is the Colombian government's failure to confront the enemy within. The moral corruption within the Colombian armed forces has permitted the phenomenal growth of the paramilitaries, eroding the legitimacy of President Andrés Pastrana. The government must also take the blame for failing to grasp a fundamental fact: poverty is to the war, what the world market for cocaine is to narco-trafficking. It is the motor driving the violence. There is no mystery about how to get rid of guerrillas and drugs. It only takes money.

Then there is the stubborn intransigence of the FARC guerrillas, their obsessive reliance on their military machine and inadequate grasp of political and economic realities of the modern world—and of the complex, urban society with which they have been trying for 20 years to reach an acceptable political settlement. To be fair, it can never be forgotten that during the previous peace process in the '80s, the FARC took the risk of fielding a civilian political movement that was brutally eliminated. The FARC and all Colombia are now suffering the irreplaceable loss of the intelligence, political savvy and leadership of an entire generation.

And, of course, the U.S. war on drugs and the fumigation campaign have done their bit to destroy the Colombian justice system and create a reservoir of recruits for the guerrillas. More recently, the inanity of U.S. policy in the Clinton administration, whose Plan Colombia program is well on its way to failure, has effectively unraveled the peace negotiations.



ELIANA APONTE/REUTERS

Carlos Castaño, Latin America's most feared death squad leader.

**S**o much human failure adds up to a tragic reality. As each slender opportunity for a negotiated outcome to 50 years of political violence is squandered, the hopes of millions of ordinary Colombians are wearing down that the fratricidal bloodletting might be stanchied, that the urgent process of reconciliation might somehow finally begin. The history of every peacemaking process proves that making peace is far more difficult, far more challenging, than making war. As negotiators on each side desperately cling by their fingernails to the slippery edge of the abyss, there is no one with the strength—or wisdom—to put a foot on the brake before they all hurtle to their mutual destruction.

Colombia has the opposite: a well-organized, ruthless, extreme right-wing conspiracy, dedicated to systematically burying the peace process beneath a heap of civilian corpses. The extreme right has infiltrated everywhere: the armed forces, the business community, the drug mafia, the Congress, the conservative wings of both political parties, even the justice system. They have their own private, mercenary army—the paramilitaries—commanded by Latin America's most feared death squad leader, Carlos Castaño. According to official investigators, Castaño has not only ordered most of the assassinations of civilian opposition figures and peace activists during the past decade, but he continues to murder with impunity,



even though he has recently embarked on a sophisticated media campaign to gain respectability.

The far-right has also recruited their candidate for the next presidential election. Four months ago, when smooth-talking, Oxford-educated Alvaro Uribe launched his campaign, he rated a mere 5 percent in the polls. After sharing the dais last month at a national convention of the cattleman's association, where the members stood to give the Falange salute and called for the government to create a nationwide militia movement to augment the army—i.e., legalization and state funding for the paramilitaries—Uribe's approval rate shot up to 17 percent. In reaction to escalating guerrilla kidnapping, extortion and terrorism, the country has polarized dangerously and the far-right has gained frightening support among the lower, middle and upper classes. Colombia has the fastest growing fascist movement in the Latin continent since the rise of Pinochet in Chile.

Everyone knows this is the reality, though few dare admit it. Certainly not the decimated ranks of the Colombian press. "The war has reached into the newsrooms," a depressed Colombian colleague explains on my first day back in Bogota after a seven-month absence. "We don't report the stories we would like to on the paramilitaries any more because we all know that our dead and exiled colleagues were targeted by the paramilitaries and the army, and we are afraid. The FARC doesn't threaten us here in Bogota. Individual guerrilla fronts operating in the countryside hit the local press if they don't like what they've written, but they don't go after us on the national level. That's why there is such silence about the paramilitaries."

It is also the reason why the FARC gets such terrible press. "Stories about the excesses of the FARC are easier to do," says my friend, "and besides, it's what the publishers and editors want."

The current crisis of the peace negotiations began in mid-November when the FARC announced a temporary "freeze" to protest the government's failure to develop a clear strategy on the paramilitaries. It is the fourth time in less than two years that negotiations between the government and the FARC have broken down, and the third time that the paramilitaries have been at the center of the crisis. This time, the FARC's withdrawal from negotiations was precipitated when President Pastrana sent his Minister of the Interior to talk to Castaño to secure the release of seven right-wing parliamentarians held hostage by his forces. In the FARC's eyes, the "kidnap" of a group of right-wing legislators was a cynical, manipulative hoax, engineered to sabotage delicate negotiations for an exchange of prisoners and to force the government to grant political status to Castaño and his mercenaries. The government's genuine surprise at the FARC's reaction was sad proof of how little the government understands who they have been talking to for nearly two years.

Three weeks and yet another appalling paramilitary atrocity later, when Pastrana faced a self-imposed deadline for renewing the legal authority of the demilitarized zone that he ceded to the FARC two years ago to provide a safe venue for talks, the president stunned Colombian supporters of the peace process by announcing he would keep the zone open only until January 31, 2001. Abruptly, Colombians realized that D-Day was upon them.

Failing a miracle, it is hard to see that come late January, anything will have intervened to alter the stand-off between the government and the FARC on the paramilitary issue. In such circumstances, even if he wanted to, it would take a far stronger president than Pastrana to face down the pressure from his generals, from powerful business leaders, from landowners, from conservative politicians of both parties, and, presumably, from the incoming Bush administration, to extend the life of the peace zone beyond the January deadline.

The call to war, amplified day after day in the pages of the Colombian media, has been intensifying for months. According to the polls, 80 percent of Colombians oppose a continuation of the demilitarized zone. It is worth asking what cross-section of the Colombian population is included in these polls? More than 50 percent of Colombians live below the poverty line and have little or no access to phones. Those people do not want the peace process to end. Nor do the nation's governors—32 of them signed a statement asking for the zone to remain open. And the 1,000-plus mayors who live on the frontlines of the civil war are so mad at Pastrana they refused to permit him to attend their convention in mid-December.

But like the demonization of the FARC and of Pastrana's peace efforts, no one will ever challenge the official wisdom propagated in the endless polls that say no one in Colombia supports the peace process. Because, of course, no one in the media or the government would ever talk to a popular leader in the barrios, or sit down for a *tinto* in the country with a campesino to find out what they think about war and peace and guerrillas and paramilitaries. Those people, poor people, don't count. They are, after all, only more than half the population.

Those who run the Colombian polls and those who want war, both in Bogotá and Washington, share a need to demonize the FARC. So there surely will be no investigative reporting into Gen. Barry McCaffrey's accusations that the FARC is trafficking with the Tijuana drug cartel. It may be true, or it may be a lie, but by the time the helicopters start to fly no one will have bothered to find out. Because by then, true or false, it will have served its purpose. If the new Bush team so decides, it will justify America's next war. □

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# Here Comes the Son

CAN BASHAR ASSAD  
BRING PEACE AND  
PROSPERITY TO SYRIA?

By Charmaine Seitz

DAMASCUS, SYRIA

**D**amascus is most striking in its slow pace and dignity. Despite its population of nearly 2 million, there is none of the chaos of Cairo or the sprawl of Amman. Unlike other Arab capitals, this city conveys a sense of permanence and pride.

That atmosphere is crucial in understanding the forces at work in Syria today. When 35-year-old Bashar Assad assumed the presidency this summer after his father's death in June, Syrians held their collective breath. After taking power in a quiet 1970 coup, Hafez Assad had led Syria through 30 years of stability—sometimes ruthlessly, always with slow calculation.

Now his little-known son, trained as an eye doctor in London, must fill those shoes. In spirit, Bashar Assad has been a more modest leader, not encouraging as many of the billboard-sized portraits and fawning children's songs that were a trademark of his father's administration. Practically, his reforms have touched everything from the economy to freedom of expression to Syria's relationship with the outside world.

Arguably the greatest challenge facing Syria today is the alleviation of poverty and the state's introduction to the world economy. Syrians say they support the slow moves toward economic privatization and government deregulation, but point to the dire straits of the ex-Soviet bloc as reason to go slowly. The country's per capita annual income is currently less than \$1,000, as compared with Israel's \$17,500. An estimated unemployment rate of 25 percent remains cloaked in government overhiring. The public sector, including 400,000 soldiers and 200,000 in internal security, is the

largest employer, with 40 percent of the national budget going to those two sectors alone.

For the average Syrian, the lack of economic growth stalls the normal flow of Arab life. Even middle-class employees who take home \$100 a month cannot afford to rent an apartment in Damascus. Land is expensive and scarce, and as such, young people put off getting married in hopes that windfall will bring them the means to provide a comfortable life.

Under Bashar Assad, however, moves to free up the economy, as well as rein in government corruption, seem to have begun in earnest. A new law allows Syrians who have studied abroad and then stayed outside the country to avoid mandatory conscription to return home by paying a fee of several thousand dollars. The move is intended to bring Syrian professionals home to invest the wealth they have earned abroad.



On the streets of Damascus.

JOSEPH BARRAK/AFP



Other legislation has opened the door to auto imports that have been restricted since the '60s—provided, of course, that buyers pay a steep import tax. And the government is also loosening its hold on information capital. Satellite hook-ups have been available for five years, making state television obsolete. Assad has made an early commitment to adding nearly 200,000 Internet lines. In September, home lines became available to those with the proper government contacts, and while some e-mail portals are blocked by the state, Internet cafés provide complete access to those who Yahoo!

These economic reforms have come hand in hand with a shifting political climate. Not only were 99 intellectuals able to issue a statement in Damascus earlier this year calling on the government to release its estimated 1,500 political prisoners, but in mid-November Assad actually freed 600 of those jailed. Additional amnesty was given on November 22 to thousands of convicted deserters and smugglers.

While these bold strokes may appear to be those of a son eclipsing his father, it is clear that Bashar is still growing into his pivotal role. Surrounded by his father's longtime advisers, the younger Assad continues to move cautiously and with their council. He knows that the greatest challenges are yet to come—from outside and perhaps from home.

Syrians take very seriously the social contract they have with the state. "We have security," says one young man (who like most Syrians asked that his name not be published). "As long as you stay away from politics, no one will bother you."

He and others tout the safety of their communities and the comfortable mixing of classes and religious backgrounds as evidence of Syria's social freedom. Indeed, unlike many places in the Arab world, both the clearly religious and the chic secular crowd frequent the same Damascus cafés. But that social contract is a product of a history of repression. In the early '80s, the government wiped out its religious opposition, killing thousands in the city of Hama and then bulldozing over the remains of the battle as if it had never happened.

Since "the events," as Syrians refer to that period, all mosques (with the exception of the great Ommayid mosque in the heart of Damascus) have been closed during non-prayer times to prevent illegal meetings. "Here, if you go to the mosque two or three times in a row, your name is recorded with the secret police," says one man who was a teen-ager at the time of Hama. "When I pray, I pray at home."

Even though this devotion is practiced privately in the secular state, this man says that Syrians are more religious than they were 15 years ago. "The secret police and all that has let up a lot," he explains. "People know not to make problems."

## Preparing for War?

As part of its slow internal transition, Syria repeatedly has signaled that it is ready and willing to negotiate the terms of a peace treaty with Israel. In June, Syrian defense minister Mustafa Tlass said publicly that efforts were already underway with Washington on restarting bilateral peace talks that had foundered under the late Syrian President Hafez Assad. Then the Israeli media was full of accolades for Syria's new leader, Bashar Assad, who it saw as a fresh face with exciting ideas.

Now Israeli descriptions of Bashar Assad are much less flattering. The Israeli-Syrian front "is liable to flare up at any moment because Bashar Assad is driving down a slope in a car that has lost its brakes," wrote Amir Oren on November 10 in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*.

After the July breakdown of Palestinian-Israeli talks at Camp David, Syria turned down new Israeli peace proposals, says Azmi Bishara, an Arab member of the Israeli Knesset. "Syria did not agree to play that game," he says, "and this is one of the most important reasons for the Israeli rage against Syria."

Israeli intelligence and defense assessments seem to be preparing for war. It is useful here to remember what happened in 1967, with Israel's creeping occupation of demilitarized zones along the Syrian border. Knowing that it could not win a full war with Israel, and not really believing that Israel would strike back, Syria allowed Palestinian guerrillas to fight as its proxy in those zones. Eventually, Israel did strike, drawing Egypt and Syria into a battle that cost them land, defeated and neutralized powerful Egyptian leader Jamal Abdul Nasser, and eventually paved the way for peace with both Egypt and Jordan.

The land Israel occupied in 1967 became its bargaining chip for regional survival. Now, as Israel fights daily battles in the West Bank and Gaza, it is again watching those northern borders. The Lebanese guerrilla group Hezbollah continues to launch attacks on Israeli targets, and Syria's hold on Lebanon is such that Israel blames it for those attacks.

Oren's article argues that Israeli and U.S. defense officials "think Bashar Assad is preparing to fire missiles as a first resort—in

retaliation for an Israeli attack on Syrian assets in Lebanon, which could come in response to another terrorist action by Hezbollah." The logic is backward but clear: Israel may move to attack Syria in Lebanon, thus drawing a Syrian response.

What would Israel gain by drawing Syria into war? Bishara says that Israel wants to frighten Syria toward a peace deal and away from its renewed relationship with Iraq. "One of the reasons for Israel's anger is the possibility of Syrian strategic thinking about the future of Iran and Iraq and Syria," he says. "Israel thinks this is a real threat, unlike the Palestinian issue."

Right now, Assad is showing himself to be moderate on all issues—except Israel. His overtures of friendship throughout the region are proving key to concerted Arab steps against Israel. "Syria is not interested in war at all," Bishara says. "Syria is planning its economy for the next 10 years. But it is not going to give up its principal national positions just to satisfy Israel or the United States for the sake of a flourishing economy."

C.S.

But one person's "problem" is another's struggle—and here in the Middle East, renewed religious fervor almost always seeks political expression. Despite the participation of independents in the political process, the Baath party remains the lone Syrian state party. Only two years ago, a deadly bomb—believed by some to have been planted by the Muslim Brotherhood—exploded next to the downtown Damascus tourism ministry. Pressures toward integration with the West—and subsequent normalization of relations with

**"We have security. As long as you stay away from politics, no one will bother you."**

Israel—are a *cause célèbre* for Islamist movements that oppose Western and capitalist hegemony.

The Syrian government—unlike Jordan and Egypt—has managed to deflect possible internal criticism by remaining stalwart in its objectives for regional peace. For one, Syria is host to 450,000 Palestinian refugees. But unlike other Arab states, the Syrian government has provided the refugees with the rights and means to move in society, to work and buy land, thus preventing the formation of a disenfranchised, radicalized minority.

In peace talks, Syria has been flexible on timetables and details, but refused to budge in its demand that Israel completely withdraw from the Golan Heights it has occupied since the 1967 Six Day War. Only then, Syria says, will it offer peace and normalization. These positions have protected Damascus from the criticism aimed at Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians that peace was given too quickly, with few Arab gains. Now that the Palestinians and Israelis again are in open conflict, calls for Arab governments to act have amplified and Syria can claim its policies were correct.

Still, even Damascus is not immune to the current radicalization of the Arab street. In the first week of renewed Palestinian-Israeli clashes, demonstrations in Damascus refugee camps were broken up violently by Syrian police. At the first full Arab summit since the Gulf War, Assad spoke quietly but pointedly of cutting ties with Israel—but he notably did not call for war (see "Preparing for War?" page 26).

Assad is in a difficult position. One of his policy initiatives has been to smooth over a previously uneasy history with Jordan and Egypt. Neither of these states would look well upon a Syrian push for more serious measures that could inflame their constituencies at home. But Syria also backs the Lebanese group Hezbollah. While Damascus says officially that Hezbollah acts independently, the presence of some 30,000 Syrian troops on Lebanese soil means that the group could not operate without Assad's blessing.

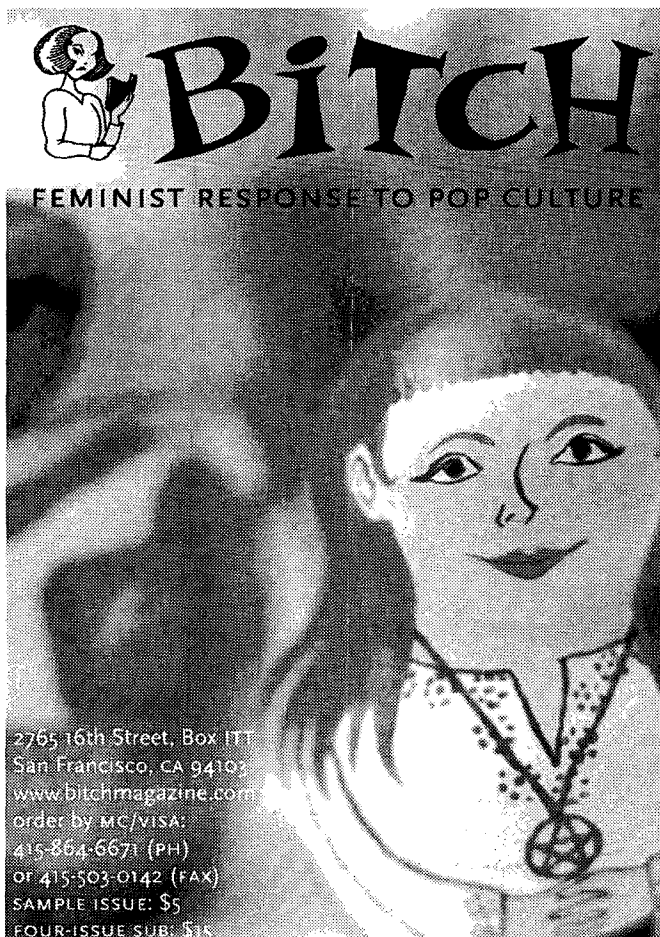
While Israel did unilaterally withdraw its army from Southern Lebanon last year, a bone of contention remains. Israel refuses to pull back from the Shabaa Farms area (what Israel calls Har Dov), saying that this was Syrian land and hence, not up for discussion until peace is made with

Damascus. But in a recent letter to the United Nations, Syria submitted that the land was Lebanese. As such, Hezbollah has continued to stage attacks there, the most recent one on November 26 that killed an Israeli officer. As promised, Israel responded, striking Lebanese targets from the air. Hezbollah also holds three Israeli soldiers and one alleged intelligence operative as bargaining chips for the release of its own men in Israeli jails.

Diplomatic efforts are being made to secure the return of the soldiers. Until then, Damascus is caught in the middle. "We hold Syria—as well as Lebanon—responsible for the quick resolution [of this issue]," Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said when the soldiers were first taken. "We maintain the right to respond with the time and means and force we find necessary."

All of these challenges have come hard and fast upon Bashar Assad. At least where Israel is concerned, he seems cautious in plotting his course. "Peace is in [Syria's] interest," says a Palestinian official in Damascus, "but we will not do it at their subjugation, as if we were lesser. It will take time, but it will come." ■

Charmaine Seitz is managing editor of Palestine Report.



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# Not Quite Bowled Over

By David Moberg

Even if the business of America is business, it takes more than money to make a society tick. Capitalism requires both financial and physical capital (that is, money and machinery). But a dynamic capitalism, it is commonly

## **Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community**

By Robert Putnam  
Simon & Schuster  
541 pages, \$26

## **Better Together**

The Report of the Saguaro Seminar:  
Civic Engagement in America  
[www.bettertogether.org](http://www.bettertogether.org)

argued, also needs new ideas, or intellectual capital, and workers' skills, or human capital. In his recent book—the elaboration of much-debated earlier articles—and in *Better Together*, a new report by the Saguaro Seminar at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, political scientist Robert Putnam makes the case that societies also need "social capital," and that the United States has suffered from a decline in social capital over roughly the past four decades.

Reviving a term used off and on over the past century, Putnam defines social capital as "connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them." It's "civic virtue" that is "embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations." Social capital represents the idea of "community" adapted to a large-scale capitalist society. Not surprisingly, social capital is more abundant in small communities than in big cities, but networks that constitute social capital develop in churches, unions, PTAs, neighborhood clubs, fraternal organizations and even bowling leagues (which have declined in the United States, even as "bowling alone"—or as a pick-up group—has increased).

It's an appealing and useful concept, a metaphorical challenge to conventional market mania in a business-oriented culture that has trouble taking anything other than capital seriously. But its fuzziness limits its value. For example, at various points Putnam identifies social capital as the equivalent of *fraternité* in the French revolutionary triad with *liberté* and *égalité*, or the application of the "golden rule," or "generalized reciprocity" (where we do things without the expectation of immediate payback), or the idea of solidarity, or Tocqueville's "self-interest rightly understood."

These different social acts and norms are important, but they're not exactly equivalent. Are the social connections that bind a longstanding reading group or bridge club together the same as the solidarity of a group of workers on strike, the communality of religious belief, the warmth of family dinners together, or even the utilitarian bonding of a neighborhood organization or environmental group?

Putnam makes some distinctions: He argues that the most

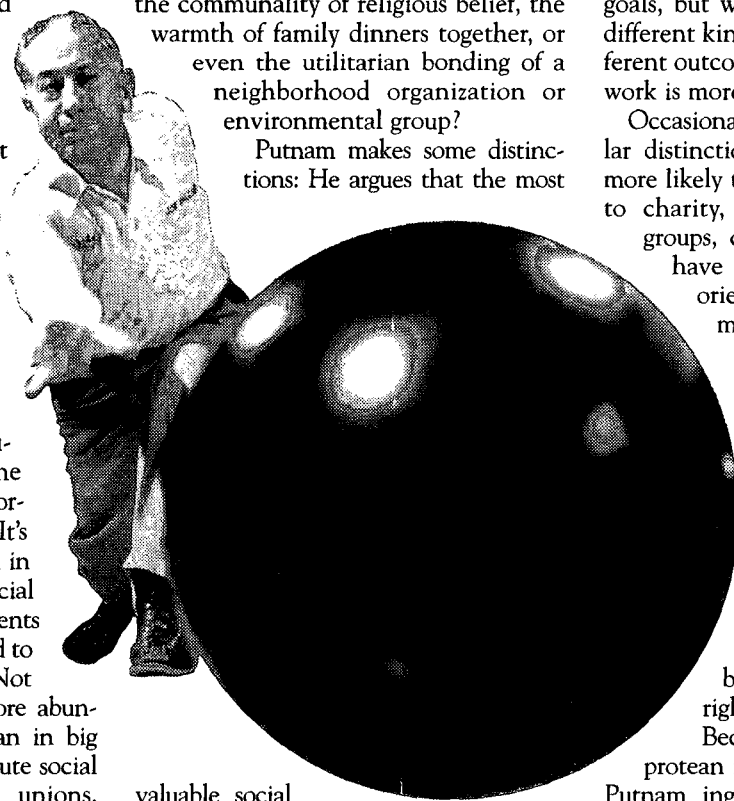
that some groups—like the Ku Klux Klan—don't fit that correlation neatly. Indeed, he argues that there are two distinct types of social capital—bonding, which links like individuals with each other, and bridging, which links different groups. The two can be at odds.

On the whole, however, Putnam argues that societies are better off in all ways if they have more social capital, whatever the type: "Social capital makes us smarter, healthier, richer, and better able to govern a just and stable democracy." He amasses an intriguing body of supportive research, showing how declining social participation is linked to declining health and satisfaction with life as well as economic growth.

But what if we looked at this activity not as capital, metaphorically building on the business model, but as work? The same kind of case could be made, for example, that the work of self-organization yields many benefits for society, even beyond its immediate goals, but we might distinguish among different kinds of work as producing different outcomes. We might decide some work is more important or effective.

Occasionally Putnam does make similar distinctions. "Joiners" are 10 times more likely to contribute time or money to charity, for example, but secular groups, compared to religious ones, have a bigger, more community-oriented effect. The "capital" metaphor can interfere with critical thinking about how different social bonds and activities affect the way people make their society. Partly because he lumps most social connections together, Putnam appeals to both conservative and progressive partisans of community, while often generating skepticism from both leftist libertarians and rightist free-marketeers.

Because social capital is such a protean notion, it's hard to measure. Putnam ingeniously mines archives of data on everything from voting behavior to consumer preferences and comes up with a vast array of indicators. Together they strongly suggest that Americans were increasingly involved in a wide vari-



valuable social capital involves long-term, direct personal relationships. While showing that societies with higher social capital generally tend to be more tolerant and egalitarian, he acknowledges

ety of organizations, including political parties, churches and unions, as well as informal social groups and clubs from the early 20th century to roughly the mid-'60s. After that turning point, there was an often dramatic decline in membership and action (such as running for office or

## Are the social bonds shared by a reading salon or bridge club really the same as the solidarity of a group of workers on strike?

voting) as well as in such attitudes as social trust. The big picture is striking, especially since rising education should have produced the opposite result.

Critics have argued that Putnam focuses on groups whose time had simply passed and ignored new small groups, social movements or links through the Internet. While he acknowledges the rise of self-help groups, he dismisses them as not providing rich ties. He notes, quite rightly, that proliferating nonprofit advocacy organizations, including many nominally progressive causes, are mainly fundraising vehicles for Washington lobbyists, policy researchers and public relations experts. While the verdict on the Internet is necessarily tentative, the Web doesn't provide personal links like regular face-to-face meetings. Nobody so far has convincingly demonstrated the emerging replacements for the groups Putnam shows as fading away.

Explaining the decline is far trickier, especially because—despite warnings that there are many causes—his lumping all these trends as declining social capital suggests that the causes are similar across the board. Indeed, after reviewing a wide range of culprits, Putnam assigns about 25 percent of the blame to television (especially habitual TV-watching), 10 percent to pressures of time and money, and 10 percent to suburbanization and sprawl. The biggest cause of decline—about half, Putnam says—is “generational change.” Indeed, many indications of social engagement—like reading a newspaper daily, voting or trusting people—have steadily declined generation to genera-

tion, primarily for people born after roughly the mid-'40s.

Putnam's estimates on the weight of different causes seem more arbitrary than most of his data. In many cases he also produces correlations without making a conclusive case that one development caused the other. The indictment of habitual television viewing is persuasive, but the question remains whether the problem is all the medium and rather than the message. (I was particularly taken with one set of graphs indicating that people who see television as their primary entertainment are much less likely to write letters, go to club meetings, attend church or work on a community project—but much more likely to give the finger to another driver.)

Yet Putnam ignores evidence that many people are working longer hours, and he fails to note how inequality and declining real income rose since the early '70s, even through business cycles. Time and money pressures may erode community more than he concludes, especially since he argues that more women work more out of economic necessity than for fulfillment, and their full-time work undercuts their traditional, central role in many civic groups.

Although the impact of TV and generational change overlap somewhat, Putnam suggests that the experience of fighting World War II was the kind of national unifying experience that boosted social involvement in the postwar years among what he calls “the long civic generation,” that is, people born from 1910 to 1940. Of course, the collective encounter with the Depression and Roosevelt's presidency could have had an impact, as well as the rebirth of unions and the postwar decline in inequality. “Generational change” labels rather than explains the phenomenon.

The inadequacy of these explanations becomes more

striking when applied to one of the major organizational declines that Putnam cites: the drop in union membership. After cursorily reviewing various explanations, he concludes that there has been a “decline in demand for union representation”—which may simply reflect declining interest in any kind of membership. But surveys suggest that at least one-third of nonunion workers want to join a union, and the interest is somewhat higher among younger workers. The obstacle, beyond lack of sufficient union organizing efforts, is aggressive employer opposition and weak laws protecting workers rights. Television, sprawl, economic insecurity and generational change don't account for that major change in organizational membership.

Many of Putnam's solutions, elaborated further in *Better Together*, sound like something that might be a project for one of his favorite social capital organizations, the Boy Scouts. They're as corny as “singing together” or as vague as fighting sprawl. Who can quarrel with organizing

a meeting to greet a new neighbor or attending PTA meetings? But is this really the top priority for solving America's problems? Putnam is clearly a well-intentioned liberal, but his solutions can feed into “compassionate conservatism.”

Indeed, the Saguaro seminar includes people from left to right, and it endorses greater government reliance on faith-based organizations, a likely Bush initiative.

There's a two-fold problem in Putnam's analysis and prescriptions. His search for community leads him to neglect social structure, especially inequalities of wealth and power. And except for his discussion of the late 19th century, when new associations proliferated along with a

broad reaction against corporate capitalism, he offers a thin historical analysis. He dismisses capitalism as the explanation for declining community as too broad, but the crucial dynamic underlying his story is the interplay between capitalism, whose monetary nexus dissolves the social relationships





he reveres, and popular reactions to market and corporate excess.

Average citizens need social capital, but mostly they need solidarity with people like themselves in challenging the powerful. They may benefit from block parties, but even more they need unions and a politics free from domination by wealth. Yet progressives can

learn much from Putnam, including the need to turn fundraising, staff-driven pseudo-organizations into vital membership organizations, to transform unions so that workers organize each other into action, or to restore grassroots organizing to media-dominated politics. Even socialists could learn something from social capitalists. ■

als—that evades taxes and stashes its wealth abroad, and that dominates a semi-democratic system with money power, particularly by controlling the mass media. A Brazilian or a Nigerian would feel right at home in the new Russia.

In Cohen's analysis, most American reporters, who uncritically and dogmatically backed Yeltsin, must share the blame for what has happened: "Like old-time Soviet journalists, American correspondents pardoned present deprivations in the name of future benefits that never materialized."

Cohen also has strong words for the Russian military campaign against Chechnya, now in its second round, and once again downplayed by Western apologists for the regime. He contends that Vladimir Putin won last March's election partly due to the Kremlin's "cynical use of a nearly genocidal military campaign as an electoral strategy," which, he notes, "is not an indicator of democracy or stability."

Furthermore, Cohen reminds us: "Russia still has some 6,000 warheads on hair-trigger alert. They are to be launched or not launched depending on information about activity at U.S. missile sites provided by an early-warning network of radars, satellites, and computers that now functions only partially and erratically." He recognizes that corrupt or malevolent Russian officials might deliberately pass loose nuclear weapons into the wrong hands, but also points out that an atomic tragedy, another Chernobyl, could just be an accident, made more likely by Russia's present disorganization.

Democratic movements elsewhere can learn from Cohen's findings. China's ruling elite, Western corporations and the globalizing ideologues are still celebrating Beijing's forthcoming admission to the World Trade Organization, but their euphoria may be short-lived. China is starting to look ominously like Russia, as an undemocratic ruling class imposes an economic master plan that enriches itself but threatens the living standards of the rest of the Chinese people. Cohen has done great service to the Chinese opposition, and to other popular movements in Brazil, Nigeria and elsewhere in the Third World, by detailing the broken and awful future that may await them. ■

## Market Bolsheviks

By James North

Stephen Cohen's superb new book, *Failed Crusade*, is indispensable—and not just as a fluent guide to the last 10 terrible years in Russia, where national production has dropped by half, transforming the unstable country, as Cohen argues persuasively, into a greater

**Failed Crusade:  
America and the Tragedy of  
Post-Communist Russia**  
By Stephen Cohen  
W.W. Norton  
320 pages, \$21.95

nuclear threat than the old Soviet Union. *Failed Crusade* also succeeds admirably in an even larger aim—proving the failure of free-market fundamentalist ideology, and documenting, with controlled but persuasive anger, the complicity of leading American journalists, academics and Clinton administration officials in a dishonest effort to cover up their own arrogant mistakes.

Cohen's expertise on the early years of the Soviet Union, demonstrated in his book *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, informs his understanding of this latest wave of ideological zealotry and brutal social engineering. In the '20s and '30s, central planning efforts of the Bolsheviks brutally transformed Russia; Cohen finds their modern counterparts in the Americans and other Westerners who (with some Russian junior partners) have conducted a new fundamentalist experiment on the Russian people. They took their blueprint not from Lenin, but from free-market textbooks. Overnight, they directed the privatization of the big state enterprises, cut social spending and eliminated the old Soviet safety net, in the



Down for the count.

hopes of encouraging Western lending and investment. This "shock therapy" was meant to jolt Russia into a functioning capitalist society.

The market Bolsheviks have had a decade. In Cohen's words, their efforts have led to "the worst peacetime industrial depression of the 20th century," making Russia a "beggar state" with "unprecedented dependence on imported goods" and "more new orphans than resulted from Russia's almost 30 million casualties in World War II."

In sum, the Russian regime is something new in history: a once highly industrialized country, once highly capable in military and space technology, that has plummeted down into the Third World. Today, Russia is ruled by a corrupt and unpatriotic oligarchy that earns foreign exchange by exporting raw materials—mainly oil, gas and miner-

# Is Jack a Dull Boy?

By Catherine Tumber

A few years ago, an old friend put the Excessive Homework Question on the map for me with this story about his 8-year-old son, Charles.

Charles' third-grade class had been given the assignment to design a presentation illustrating some aspect

**The End of Homework: How Homework Disrupts Families, Overburdens Children, and Limits Learning**

By Etta Kralovec and John Buell  
Beacon Press  
192 pages, \$18

of a non-U.S. culture's way of life. Charles' father labored with his son for two evenings to construct a model Cherokee teepee, along with descriptions of Cherokee culture. Confident and excited, Charles bounded proudly into school to present his project to the class.

The other project scheduled for that afternoon examined various features of South Korean culture. Garbed in full traditional Korean costume, this student had cooked samples of Korean food for the entire class. While they ate, she discussed South Korean folkways. To cap off the presentation, she distributed to every student a bound copy of a computer-generated cookbook of Korean recipes. Whew! Now that's a lot of homework. Not surprisingly, she got an A for her (and her parents') efforts; Charles (and his Dad) got a C.

My friend recounted this story not as a matter of sour grapes—indeed, he felt a bit chagrined about encouraging his kid to rely on that hoary old standby, the teepee—but to raise questions about how much homework is too much, whether children are doing more homework than they used to, and how early in life children should be expected to do schoolwork at home. These questions grew into a rising refrain in the late '90s, and even caught the attention of *Time* and *Newsweek*, which featured the home-

work question as cover stories two years ago. And now we have Etta Kralovec and John Buell's *The End of Homework*, a title that announces the broad intent of what they hope will become a grassroots movement.

The authors' case for ending homework, or for at least keeping it to a bare minimum, is cast within a larger critique of today's corporate culture. They claim that the pressures of the go-go new economy have distorted our otherwise praiseworthy work ethic. Furthermore, they invoke Sam Bowles and Herb Gintis' New Left critique that the purpose of education since the '50s has been not to teach critical thinking or a specific body of knowledge, but to socialize children for work in the corporate workplace—or for the “reserve army” of the unemployed. In today's economy, with its growing class stratification and reliance on computer technology, children from poor and working-class families are placed even further behind the educational and economic eight

**Ending homework would help parents take back family life and “pass on to their children something other than the exhaustion of endless work.”**

ball than they were 25 years ago, when the public school system was already coming apart at the seams.

So what does homework have to do with all this? And how on earth might curtailing homework provide an issue around which to organize resistance to the new economic behemoth? Before you mock Kralovec and Buell as hopelessly permissive, pie-eyed children of

the counterculture, consider their very credible point of view. Circumstantial evidence suggests that homework is increasing, they observe, and that it is being relied upon to do the work of teachers who are strapped for time and resources in a climate ungenerous with education funding. Parents are, in effect, doing “unpaid labor” when they come home at night—labor that should be done by teachers. For that matter, so are children, whose “work” should be confined to the 40-hour week for which labor unions fought long and hard.

The best that can be said for the increase in homework is that it involves parents in their children's formal learning process, and keeps them abreast of what's going on—or missing—in the classroom. But in addition to forcing parents and children to do “unpaid labor,” there are many other difficulties with rising homework expectations. On a personal level, it turns the kitchen table into a battle zone between exhausted parents—who are already giving enough of their energy to the new economy, thank you very much—and their children, most of whom are already overextended with family obligations and extracurricular activities like sports and community service.

Furthermore, excessive homework leaves unfulfilled the developmental needs of children—for fresh-air activity and social play—at the same time that it intrudes on the nondisciplinary, nurturing aspects of parents' relationships with their kids. Politically, homework is no longer just a big drag; it has become downright oppressive. As teachers rely more heavily on homework to “cover” all that they are expected to teach, the authors argue most persuasively, education becomes less an equal-opportunity leveler and more a dividing wedge between social classes. Children with educated parents, a home library, a computer and quiet study quarters are obviously more likely to do their homework, and to excel at it, than those who lack these things.

Enmeshed in larger political troubles, the authors claim, excessive homework requires an organized political response. They advise forming



"consciousness-raising groups," akin to '70s-era feminism, as a prelude to organizing on the local school-board level. And their ambitions go well beyond this: "We believe that reform in homework practices is central to a politics of family and personal liberation. Taking back our home lives will allow us to begin the process of enriching our community lives. Drawing a clearer line between the school and the home may enable families to reconstitute themselves as families, and help parents to pass on to their children something other than the exhaustion of endless work."

the authors support more "ethnographic" case studies, and research based on the "ecological" methods developed in the new field of "family studies"—all of which may be, one must wonder, just as intrusive as homework itself. Oddly, the only original research here comes unfreighted with education-school heavy artillery, and, though only briefly described, it is convincing: Kralovec's successful one-semester experiment with a homework-free high-school classroom.

Remarkably, Kralovec and Buell don't really prove that homework is actually on the increase, though it sure

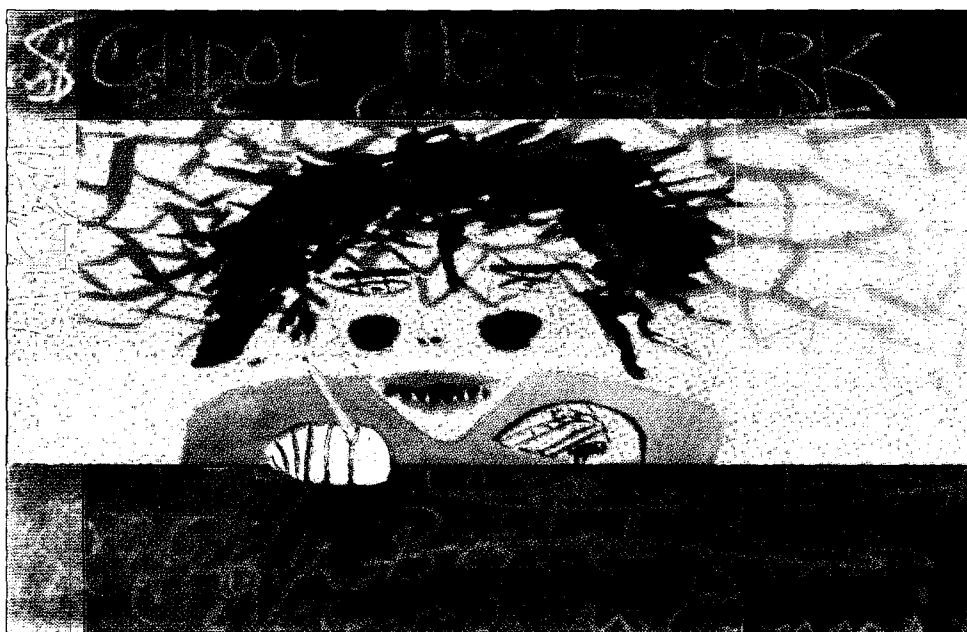
for battle with local school boards. So, too, might have discussion of how homework may be affected by the inveterate public head-butting between education reformers and teachers unions.

In a general historical chapter, the authors regale would-be activists with tales of anti-homework crusades in the past, notably during the Progressive Era and the '60s. It is interesting to note that in the early years of the 20th century, Edward Bok, editor of *Ladies' Home Journal*, conducted a nearly one-man anti-homework campaign that resulted in some schools abolishing homework altogether. This is encouraging, but it would have been more useful to learn about how anti-homework reformers have viewed the place of education in a democracy. After all, not all of those opposed to homework were "progressives," as the authors imply; many were conservatives, some of whom questioned the very concept of public education, the absence of biblical teaching in the schools, and progressivism itself. How did these people work together? Or did they?

Although the authors do not grapple with such questions, *The End of Homework* is a useful volume that begins to frame the argument against homework and offers a liberal brief for "family values" absent in the all-too-common pedocentric cant—no mean feat, considering the subject. Kralovec and Buell are, on the whole, persuasive—despite the leaps of faith they ask of their readers, and their unexamined commitment to "personal and family liberation," whatever that means.

Liberated or not, parents must have some control over the daily rhythm and discipline of their families, and we've all heard enough horror stories by now to know that external demands on our children's time—including homework—is making that more difficult. ■

Catherine Tumber is a fellow in the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research at Harvard University.



Kralovec and Buell's analysis is compelling—so compelling, in fact, that it deserves a better book than the one they've written. Generally it is intended to frame broadly the terms of a movement consisting of parents, educators, academics and policy-makers alike. But the authors offer only the thinnest of gruel for each.

For empirical weight, they rely heavily on Harris Cooper's 1989 study *Homework*, a monograph survey of extant research on the topic, which shows that the influence of homework on student achievement cannot be verified. Studies are about evenly divided on the question, though they incline toward showing that homework is more beneficial on the high school level than in grade school. So

does seem that way. What has changed—and this goes unmentioned by the authors—is the passage of a series of federal education laws in 1994, with which the states have been scrambling to comply. Anticipating these changes in 1993, Massachusetts, for example, established regulations that mandated the number of "structured learning time" hours students must spend in school each year. The most zealous administrators have cut study halls and other kinds of unstructured in-school time, during which students in the past had been able to do a good share of their homework. Discussion of the new laws and how they are being implemented might have given reformers something substantial with which to gird themselves

# Liberal Family Feud

By Jefferson Decker

**G**eorge Packer's grandfather, George Huddleston, made a career as a lawyer and a congressman by defending debtors, miners and industrial workers in Birmingham, Alabama against the steel trust and Wall Street. Never

**Blood of the Liberals**  
By George Packer  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux  
405 pages, \$26

popular with conservative Democrats (who tagged him the "Little Bolshevik"), Huddleston nearly lost his seat in 1918 when Woodrow Wilson intervened on behalf of his primary opponent.

So in 1935, other members were dumbfounded when Huddleston put his 20-year career in Washington on the line to fight Franklin Roosevelt on a piece of New Deal legislation called the Public Utility Holding Company Bill. One colleague chided Huddleston on the House floor for opposing the legislation, which gave the federal government more control over hydroelectric power. "The great liberal—yes, the radical of 1917," the member complained, was "closing his great career as the conservative gentleman from Birmingham."

Huddleston shot back: "Men have called me a liberal. ... But always I have called myself a 'Democrat,' an old-fashioned, southern, Jeffersonian Democrat. ... My principles and myself remain unchanged—it's the definition of 'liberalism' which has been changed." The next year he lost the Democratic primary.

Herbert Packer, the author's father, was a law professor who attracted political conflict. In 1955, he barely survived a late hiccup of McCarthyism, when a radio commentator and a group of trustees tried to block his appointment to the Stanford University faculty. (They contended that his research on ex-Communist witnesses was insufficiently anti-communist.) Then came the '60s. As Stanford's vice-provost for academic

affairs in 1968, Packer ended up as the administration's point man during the upheaval. And though he was a dove on Vietnam, his job put him in direct conflict with Stanford's students in protests and negotiations over the war, grade policy, curricula and minority recruiting. The struggle was often over the very terms of the debate, with Packer's rationalist, procedural approach to politics clashing with the students' emphasis on authenticity and "human values." The experience made him bitter, even vindictive. Then his body failed him. In early 1969, he suffered a massive stroke, which left him partially paralyzed. Four years later, he took his own life.

**T**hese two sudden failures provide the pivotal moments in George Packer's three-generation family memoir, *Blood of the Liberals*. They also provide the book's



narrative glue. In many ways, the father and grandfather couldn't have been less alike. Huddleston, the son of failed farmers from Tennessee, was Southern, traditional, largely self-educated. He headed up a large and noisy clan of Birmingham relatives, fought constantly with his hard-drinking wife, and once exchanged gunfire over a courtroom insult. Politically, he supported econom-

ic populism and (when pressed on the subject) defended Jim Crow.

Herbert Packer, the son of Jewish immigrants in Connecticut, was Yale-educated, cosmopolitan, an intellectual. Reserved (to the point, his son suggests, of being repressed), he served in the Pacific during World War II and then pursued a mostly quiet life of academic study. Politically, he supported civil rights and government intervention to manage the economy, but he wasn't particularly interested in class politics. Huddleston's heroes were Jefferson and Jackson. Packer's were Wilson and FDR (both of whom had tried to end Huddleston's career). In the brief time they knew each other, there was no love lost between them.

Yet they shared a family—Herbert Packer married Huddleston's daughter, Nancy—and a peculiar and unfortunate trajectory. For each represented, in his particular time and place, some idea of what it meant to be an American liberal—a reformer who hoped to promote freedom and equality, an essential part of the Democratic electoral coalition.

Huddleston put his faith in an 18th-century notion of freedom, which elevated independent men against the rich and big business—and their presumed agent, the state. Accordingly, he was suspicious of the steel kings in Pittsburgh and the government in Washington. Packer defended the more modern notion that a just society means treating people the same way; he trusted an active, managerial state to protect civil liberties and root out racial discrimination. Each saw his brand of liberalism win some major accomplishments before creaking under the stress of new realities. For Huddleston, this happened in the '30s, when the New Dealers used the federal government to con-

front the grossest inequalities of industrial society—and he rejected them. For Packer, in the '60s, social movements on the left and (with more lasting political success) the right rebelled against the mid-century liberal consensus.

**G**eorge Packer's own story, which makes up the third part of the book, doesn't follow the same path. He comes of



age in the '70s, in the wake of Vietnam and Watergate, and reaches political maturity during the Reagan and Gingrich revolutions—not exactly promising times for progressive politics. In his own experience, liberalism seemed to be in a state of intellectual disrepair, “a set of fixed positions that went along with a certain way of life peculiar to a narrow social class” rather than a positive agenda.

The liberals he knew defended generous social welfare provisions but balked at fundamentally changing the structure of the economy; the protest politics he encountered emphasized ironic gestures, like public “die-ins,” sometimes at the expense of rational persuasion or building electoral coalitions. Identity politics (when divorced from a universal language of equality) divided possible allies from one another and ceded too much rhetorical high ground to the right. Yet universal claims also seemed to lack force, or were too easily bent to fit social prejudices or maintain privileges of a certain elite: During the crisis over school integration in Boston in the '70s, the teen-age Packer asked his mother (who supported busing) whether she would let him be moved from his good Palo Alto public school to a struggling junior high across the tracks. She told him no, because “education meant more to us than people in South Boston.”

Dissatisfied with the political alternatives he is dealt, Packer goes looking for some new choices, within and outside of traditional liberal-Democratic politics. He volunteers in homeless shelters and travels to Africa with the Peace Corps. He joins the Boston chapter of Democratic Socialists of America. He follows a group of activists who mix faith and political organizing at new, interracial, evangelical churches that have sprung up in Birmingham between the fall of Jim Crow and the rise of the Christian right—several of which were involved in an effort to turn around a struggling housing project. And he celebrates Bill Clinton's election in 1992, which he hopes will mean the end of conservative dominance.

But none are completely satisfactory: volunteerism seems dwarfed by massive social forces; the inspiration of faith undermined by its capacity to shame; the very word “socialism” a dead-end with almost all Americans; and Clinton

a “a badly flawed vessel into which to pour such hope and meanings.” He hasn't yet faced the singular, brutal defeat that stunned his grandfather and father—in part because he has never come close to a victory.

**Goethe once complained that there “are no liberal ideas, only liberal sentiments,” but George Packer thinks that's a good thing.**

A journalist and writer by trade (he previously penned a Peace Corps memoir and a couple of novels), Packer concentrates more on evoking people and places than on presenting an original historical argument about how or why things happened. For the most part, he avoids the temptation to over-generalize and turn the various characters into living embodiments of stock characters from political sociology (the Southern populist, the Adlai Stevenson liberal, etc.). And there's a pleasure meeting a family as obsessed with partisan politics as this one. Young George Packer names his new puppy Roosevelt and, at age seven, takes this first stab at an autobiography: “When I was five, Johnson was running for President against Goldwater. Johnson won. ... When I was seven, I voted for McCarthy.”

For their wedding, Nancy Huddleston and Herbert Packer write their vows in the form of “nominating speeches” and “platforms,” in verse:

We nominate Nancy to head the Liberals  
Where lime, ore, and coal are the minerals ...  
She attracts young men of high repute  
Tho' they sometimes part in grave dispute,  
For she loves to argue keen and strong  
And aims to right 'most every wrong ...

Goethe once complained that there “are no liberal ideas, only liberal sentiments,” but George Packer thinks that's a good thing. “Few people,” he writes, “reach a political opinion by deduction from an abstract system of philosophy; most feel their way into the opinions

they hold, often contradictory ones, and are hardly aware of the forces within and without that drive them.” This is true, so far as it goes. Family, history, religion, tradition and identity all pull at our political conscience, and help to determine how we vote, for whom we volunteer, where we speak out. The terms of a political debate can change overnight, good ideas can go bad—and in such cases it might be smarter to trust one's heart than to go for ideological consistency.

For this reason, Packer criticizes a spate of recent books on political theory or electoral strategy that “approach liberalism's decline—or the left's, or democracy's, or America's—as a philosophical problem. ... Retool the basic structure, remix the ingredients, a little less individualism, a little more community, a little less race, a little more class, and you'll attract a majority.”

These days, he argues, the “deepest impediments [to social change] aren't intellectual but psychological, even existential.” George Huddleston and Herbert Packer may not have agreed on many specific ideas, but they shared a faith in “collective self-betterment”—the idea that we might work together to improve the lot of all people—that is all-too-often missing from much of contemporary culture. This puts them both squarely in the liberal tradition.

Yet in a book that chronicles so many shifts in the political landscape, so many disagreements among liberals and lefties and populists and reformers, this seems to tie the whole story together a little too neatly. For the issues that divided Huddleston and Packer are not completely regional or generational. They were also about the amount of trust each put in government, in organized citizens, in economic democracy, in the practical value of abstract concepts of justice—and to what degree each would shape policies and ideas. Those philosophical differences are real, and stubbornly persistent.

After the Holding Company Bill passed, Roosevelt's brain trust repaired to Joe Kennedy's Marwood estate to sip mint juleps and compare sailing stories from college days. Reading Packer's description, it's suddenly hard to know who to root for: the embittered old congressman battling his own party over

legislation that would help his constituents, or the New Dealers gloating over the defeat of an independent-minded Democrat. (One of them even pulled out a banjo and lead the group in singing, "Old George Huddleston ain't what he uster be, ain't what he uster be.") *Blood of the Liberals* describes dozens of such conflicts, where two

opposing positions might reasonably lay claim to the true liberal principle. If Packer's broad view of liberalism prevents him from choosing among them, it does make him an engaging and personal chronicler of the dilemmas. ■

Jefferson Decker is managing editor of Boston Review.

on the artist's work in a new form, only to find a highly watchable film on the Brooklyn street kid who capped a meteoric career in the art world with his death from a heroin overdose at 27.

In *Before Night Falls*, technically a far more ambitious project than *Basquiat*, Schnabel showcases for broader audiences his uncanny combination of charm, corn, exuberance and sentiment. The movie works terrifically. It features a central performance by Spanish superstar Javier Bardem who fully deserves his multiple awards (notably at the Venice Film Festival). It tells a compelling, tightly paced tale. It's full of small visual wonders and laced with delicious celebrity cameos (Johnny Depp both as a transvestite prisoner and as the prison guard; Sean Penn as a cranky peasant), as well as a nice turn for the director's liquidly handsome young son as the youthful Arenas.

The film stays on the safe side of every political controversy. To Cuban-Americans mobilized to pounce on the film for being soft on dictatorship, Schnabel has simply put Castro on screen, in documentary footage that indicts him out of his own mouth. For gays and lesbians, this is a richly drawn portrait of someone whose sexuality was an essential aspect of his public art and the passion for freedom that infused every part of his art. And Schnabel has not slighted Arenas' criticism of his refuge in exile. He features a quip Arenas developed in his first encounters with the U.S. press: "The difference between the communist and capitalist systems is that, although both give you a kick in the ass, in the communist system you have to applaud, while in the capitalist system you can scream."

The story closely follows Arenas' memoir. Reinaldo the little boy ecstatically experiences the wonder of the natural world, including the steamy human beings who surround him. Blue filters that enhance the green quality of the countryside and tinkering with color contrast give this opening segment a peculiarly engaging look, part documentary and part portrait. This approach to representing visual memory

# Freedom To Scream

By Pat Aufderheide

**T**he gay Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas was a kind of open wound of left politics in the '80s. As a

**Before Night Falls**  
Directed by Julian Schnabel

censored author in a communist dictatorship, he was walking proof of a God that failed, though the anti-communists, neocons and anti-Castro Cubans who heralded his cause also often found his sexually charged art somewhat alarming. As a victim of anti-homosexual persecution in a puritanical regime, Arenas was an icon for the rising movement of gay and lesbian identity politics, as much for his performance of his sexuality as for his art. When it became evident he was dying of AIDS, he also became a symbol of gay demands for more social resources directed to the disease. As an outspoken organizer of anti-Castro activities, he won the scorn of New Leftists who believed that the post-Mariel Cuban government had learned a lesson from its ugly history and that gay activists like Arenas were being exploited by right-wingers.

Various hailed and denounced for reasons that intersected with but did not capture his passions, Arenas continued furiously to compose poetry and novels. In an expiring act of vitality, he completed his memoirs—and then, in impoverished exile in New York, took his own life at the age of 37 in 1990. Now another high-profile artist has told Arenas' life story, in *Before Night Falls*, a film which borrows its title from the author's memoir.

Director Julian Schnabel is a celebrity artist, an artist of celebrity even. He launched his career in the plastic arts within the aura of Andy Warhol, succeeding in making the pop artist downright peevish with jealousy. No amount of critical contempt for the crude simplicity



of his broken-plate sculpture-paintings stopped him from becoming a gallery and society darling. When his first film, *Basquiat*, came out in 1996, critics lined up to pour scorn



serves the film well when the teen-ager runs away to join the rebels, who are already driving trucks and tanks toward the capital in victory in 1958.

Arenas' negotiation of a riotous sexual revolution on the beaches and his burgeoning literary career are counterpointed with the growing problems of basic provisioning (a typewriter, a bottle of wine, a place to sleep) and the first signs of repression. Savagely funny anecdotes, edited with joke-like punch and shot in locations and with filters that emphasize summer sunlight, tell this part of the story. Rich information about the look and feel of Havana at the time are packed into scenes of reminiscence, in which period music floods a street or cabaret. (As always, however, Schnabel chooses effective over authentic; in one nightclub sequence, careful listeners will hear Lou Reed on the soundtrack, inserted because Schnabel believed it better evoked Arenas' state of feeling than period Cuban music.)

The encroaching repression is told in sequences that condense history. In a scene that deftly reveals the political function of the writers' union, the legendary Cuban author José Lezama Lima confidentially shares with Arenas his understanding that artists are the enemy of the regime by definition. The real-life show trials of writer Heberto Padilla and military leader Arnaldo Ochoa are merged. Darkness descends as Arenas is captured and plunged into the flickering hell of El Morro (filmed in deep reds and brown in a similar Spanish colonial castle-prison in Mexico), where he becomes the star of the prison because of his ability to write.

Schnabel powerfully and flashily recreates images from Arenas' poetry to make synaptic statements about Arenas' emotions. Within the prison, for instance, the sight of a dark grated prison wall, animated by the many swinging items that prisoners use to communicate with their resident author, is a visual poem drawn from the Arenas' own description. After his release from prison, Arenas finds a hotel room that happens to adjoin an abandoned nunnery, which he and his raffish friends soon invade, just as they did in real life.

Then, in an episode that draws not on Arenas' life but on his prose poetry, the

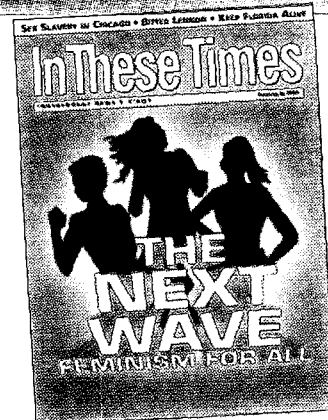
friends try to escape in a gas balloon. A turncoat among them attempts to flee without them; the attempt fails miserably with a crash on the Malecón, the Havana seawall (preternaturally and accurately reconstructed for the film in Vera Cruz, Mexico). It is one of those boldly larger-than-life gestures that dot the film and that remind one of the way in which a large screen can make over-the-top excess just enough. Arenas' delight at the feel of snow on his face when he arrives in New York—a thrill that also signifies freedom—also becomes an in-your-face visual thrill.

Schnabel told *In These Times*, with the kind of wry self-delight for which he is known, that famed Cuban writer Guillermo Cabrera Infante told him *Before Night Falls* was "the greatest Cuban film, and it was made by a Jew in Mexico." He also carefully notes the participation of Arenas' longtime friend Lázaro Gómez Carriles in the writing of the script. "Lázaro calls me Reinaldo sometimes," he says. "It's like Reinaldo kind of wrote me into the script." While he acknowledges his great debt to Arenas' writing, in the end, Schnabel says, "This is a movie, whether the guy was a great or a terrible writer. It has to succeed on its own merits."

Schnabel's goal is to entertain, so it's not surprising what is omitted. The movie never engages one of the most sharply drawn parts of the memoir, where Arenas with a cruel but fair wit ridicules what he calls a "festive and fascist left" that internationally supported Castro. It skips delicately past Arenas' Miami experience, which avoids having to deal with his denunciation of a gossip-filled "plastic world" where physical and moral swamps coincided. It leaves on the page some of his more bitter comments about women. Arenas' suicide letter, in which he holds Fidel Castro accountable for his death, is excluded.

*Before Night Falls* tells a story with universal themes, of a search for freedom that transcends political limits. It does not examine the history of a political era, and so it does not and cannot explore why Arenas' life became the crossroads of so many political passions. But the story it does tell, it tells with flourish and with heart. ■

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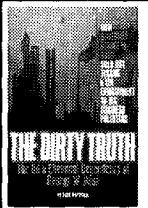
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**SYLVIA**

the terribly lonely Detective has a visit from a friend...



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**By Nicole Hollander**

I WAS FEELING KIND OF LOW WHEN SAMMY WALKED IN, CARRYING A BEAUTIFULLY WRAPPED BOX. "HAPPY HOLIDAYS, PAL," HE SAID. I TORE INTO IT... "SAMMY," I SAID, "IT'S A BALLOT BOX." "FROM FLORIDA!" HE SAID PROUDLY. "I FIGURED IT MIGHT BE WORTH SOMETHING SOMEDAY!" "IT'S FULL OF BALLOTS," I SAID, AGHAST... "DO YOU REALIZE YOU MAY HAVE CHANGED THE OUTCOME OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION?" "THEY WOULDN'T BE WORTH MUCH OTHERWISE, RIGHT?" HE GRINNED. "GOT ANY DONUTS?"

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Durito has come to say good-bye to Mexico City and has decided to give a gift to this city, about which everyone complains and no one abandons. A gift. This is Durito, a beetle of the Lacandon Jungle in the center of Mexico City.

Durito says good-bye with a gift.

He makes an elegant magician's gesture. Everything stops. The lights go out like a candle extinguished by a gentle lick of wind on its face. Another gesture and a reflecting light illuminates a music box in the display window. A ballerina in a fine lilac costume holds an endless stillness, hands crossed overhead, legs held together, balanced on tip-toes. Durito tries to imitate the position, but promptly gets his many arms entangled. Another magic gesture, and a piano, the size of a cigarette box, appears. Durito sits in front of the piano and puts a jug of beer on top—who knows where he got it from, but it's already half empty. He cracks and flexes his fingers, doing digital gymnastics just like the pianists in the movies. Then he turns toward the ballerina and nods his head. The ballerina begins to stir and makes a bow. Durito hums an unknown tune, beats a rhythm with his little legs, closes his eyes.

The first notes begin. Durito plays the piano with four hands. On the other side of the glass pane, the ballerina begins to twirl and gently lifts her right thigh. Durito leans on the keyboard and plays furiously. The ballerina performs her best steps within the prison of the little music box. The city disappears. There is nothing but Durito at his piano and the ballerina in her music box. Durito plays, and the ballerina dances. The city is surprised; its cheeks blush as when one receives an unexpected gift, a pleasant surprise, good news. Durito gives his best gift: an unbreakable and eternal mirror, a good-bye that is harmless, that heals, that cleanses. The spectacle lasts only a few instants. The last notes fade as the cities that populate this city take shape again. The ballerina returns to her uncomfortable immobility; Durito turns up the collar of his trench coat and makes a slight bow toward the display window.

"Will you always be behind the glass pane?" Durito asks her, and asks himself. "Will you always be on the other side of my over here, and will I always be on this side of your over there?"

Durito crosses the street, arranges his hat and continues to walk. Before going around the corner, he turns toward the display window: He notices a star-shaped hole in the glass. The alarms are ringing uselessly. Behind the window, the ballerina is no longer in the music box.



"This city is sick," Durito writes to me. "When its illness becomes a crisis, it will be cured. This collective loneliness, multiplied by millions and empowered, will end by finding itself and finding the reason for its powerlessness. Then, and only then, will this city shed its gray dress and adorn itself with brightly colored ribbons, which are so abundant in the provinces.

"This city lives a cruel game of mirrors, but the game of the mirrors is useless and sterile if finding the transparency of glass is not a goal. It is enough to understand this and, as who-knows-who said, struggle and begin to be happy.

"I'm coming back. Prepare the tobacco and the insomnia. I have a lot to tell you, Sancho."

Durito signs off. ■

Adapted from *Our Word Is Our Weapon*, selected writings of Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, recently published by Seven Stories Press.

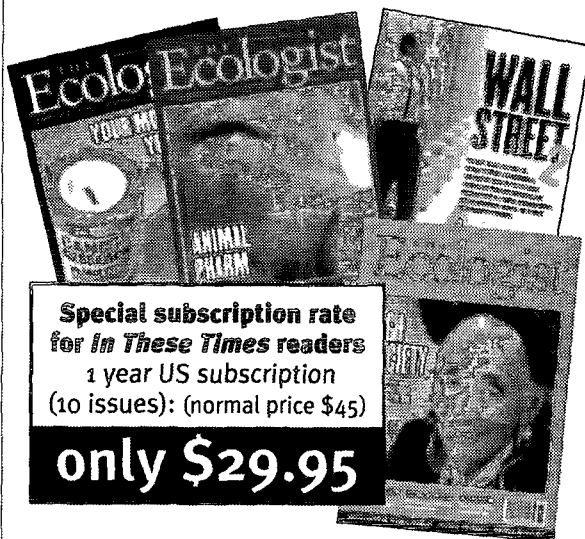
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In the breathless solitude of the first years of the Zapatista uprising, a peculiar fellow appeared at our camp; a little smoking beetle, very well read and an ever better talker, who gave himself the task of giving his company to a soldier, El Sup.

Legally named Nebuchadnezzar, this beetle, traveling incognito, goes under the *nom de guerre* Durito, because of his hard shell. ...

From the mountains of southeast Mexico  
SUBCOMANDANTE INSURGENTE MARCOS

Dawn. Mexico City. Durito wanders through the streets adjoining the Zocalo. Sporting a small trench coat and a hat angled like Humphrey Bogart in *Casablanca*, Durito pretends to pass unnoticed. His outfit and slow crawl are unnecessary, as he sticks to the shadows that escape the bright display windows. Shadow of the shadow, silent walk, angled hat, a dragging trench coat, Durito walks at dawn through Mexico City. No one notices him. They do not see him, not because he is well disguised or because of that tiny, quixotic detective outfit from the '50s, or because he is barely distinguishable from the mounds of garbage. Durito walks amid papers being dragged here and there by a whisk of the unpredictable winds that populate the dawns of Mexico City. No one sees Durito, for the simple reason that in this city no one sees anyone.

"This city is sick," Durito writes to me. "It is sick from loneliness and fear. It is a great collective of solitudes. It is a collection of cities, one for each resident. It's not about sums of anguish (do you know of a loneliness without anguish?), but about a potency; each loneliness is multiplied by the number of lonely people that surround it. It is as though each person's

solitude entered a House of Mirrors, like those you see in the country fairs. Each solitude is a mirror that reflects another solitude; and like a mirror, bounces off more solitudes."

Durito has begun to discover that he is in foreign territory, that the city is not his place. In his heart and in this dawn, Durito packs his bag. He walks this road as though taking inventory, a last caress, like a lover who knows this is good-bye. At certain moments, the sound of footsteps diminishes and the cry of the sirens, which frightens outsiders, increases. And Durito is one of those outsiders, so he stops on the corner each time the red-and-blue blinking lights crisscross the street. Durito takes advantage of the complicity of a doorway in order to light a pipe guerrilla-style: a tiny spark, a deep breath, and the smoke engulfing his gaze and face. Durito stops. He looks and sees. In front of him, a display window catches his eye. Durito comes near and looks through the great glass pane to what exists beyond it. Mirrors of all shapes and sizes, porcelain and glass figurines, cut crystal, tiny music boxes. "These are no talking boxes," Durito says to himself, without forgetting the long years spent in the jungle of the Mexican Southeast.

*Continued on page 37*